United Nations A/56/PV.69

General Assembly

Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

69th plenary meeting
Thursday, 29 November 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 41

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/56/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/642)

Draft resolutions (A/56/L.19, A/56/L.20, A/56/L.21, A/56/L.22)

The President: I first give the floor to Mr. Papa Louis Fall of Senegal in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce draft resolutions A/56/L.19 to L.22 in the course of his statement.

Mr. Fall (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*spoke in French*): At a time when all the continents together, in communion with the United Nations, are celebrating the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, with dignity, fervour and deep reflection, I take stock, with seriousness and humility, of the honour that I have been given to speak on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We would like to take this occasion to extend once again our warm compliments to you, Sir, and to say how glad we are to see you preside so capably over the General Assembly at its historic fifty-sixth session.

Before I offer myself up to the ritual of presenting the draft resolutions whose consideration is on the Assembly's agenda, I would like, without imposing too much on your patience, to refer to the most salient events and facts that have marked the recent history of Israeli-Palestinian relations and affected the peace process in the dramatic way that we have all experienced.

As the Assembly knows, since it was first established in 1975, the Committee over which I have the honour to preside has endorsed the sacred cause of the Palestinian people regarding the exercise of its inalienable rights concerning, inter alia, self-determination without foreign intervention, independence, national sovereignty, the right of return and the restitution of property.

The Assembly is no doubt well aware that our Committee's mandate is triply rooted: in the painful past of the Middle East, in the convulsions and uncertainty of the present, and in expectations and hope for a better future. Evolving along the jagged edge between cohabitation and "cohabitension," events have moved quickly from September 1993 — when the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements was signed and there was mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, followed by the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in Jericho and Gaza — up to the present time, which was punctuated a few days

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ago by the important speech in Louisville by the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell.

Members will recall that meanwhile the provocative visit of Mr. Sharon to Haram al-Sharif at the end of September 2000, the resulting Palestinian protests and the brutal Israeli crackdown that followed have exacerbated the resentment, brought about an explosion of rage and unleashed the start of a new Palestinian uprising: the intifada al-Aqsa.

The Assembly is aware of the tragedies that have stained the 14 months since the arrogant profanation of the esplanade of the mosques: protests filled with indignation and revolt in the occupied Palestinian territory; murderous incursions by Israeli forces in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem; blind or targeted assassinations; mass destruction of property; the establishment of new settlements and the expansion of old ones; military occupation; closure of towns; the merciless blockade by the occupying power, et cetera.

These exactions and confrontations provoked by Israeli troops have caused a thousand deaths and just as many wounded — for the most part Palestinians, including many children — led to the expulsion from Israel of tens of thousands of Palestinian workers, paralyzed economic activity in Palestine, and exposed the population to distress and wandering, destroying at the same time whatever residual trust might have remained between the two parties.

Members will agree that faced with such risks of disastrous confrontation, with incalculable consequences in the region and the world, the international community has tried to control the situation through the establishment of a Fact-Finding Committee, created during the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit in October 2000 and chaired by former United States Senator Mr. George Mitchell. The Committee put forward relevant recommendations designed to relaunch the peace process — recommendations to which Israel has tried to take a rather selective approach.

Members will no doubt share the conviction of our Committee that the above-mentioned events in many ways reflect policies of defiance and practices of fait accompli on the part of the occupying Power, its refusal to abide by the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the flouting by Israel of its obligations under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949. In this regard, one should take note of the important meeting to be held on 5 December of the Conference of High Contracting Parties to consider the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

On many occasions our Committee has expressed its serious concern over the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory that I have just described. More than once we have drawn the attention of the international community to the dangers that the conflict poses to the entire region. We have emphasized the urgent need for outside intervention or intercession, asked for international protection for innocent civilians and firmly demanded that international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council be strictly respected.

Our Committee welcomes the constructive and leading role played by the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator. We have encouraged them to persevere along this path, in cooperation with the co-sponsors of the peace process — the United States, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations — while urging the donor community to provide increased budgetary and humanitarian assistance to help the Palestinians to overcome the worst difficulties of the moment.

In accord with the General Assembly and the Security Council, our Committee remains convinced that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility for the question of Palestine until it is effectively settled, and in all its aspects. For their part, the members of the Committee are determined to pursue, in a constructive way, concrete action in implementation of their mandate, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and with the valuable help of all the interested and concerned parties. In doing so, our Committee is even prepared to extend its cooperation to all other States and entities that so wish in order to help bring about our common objective: a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

Having put forward these considerations, I would now like very briefly to introduce the four draft resolutions in documents A/56/L.19 to L.22, realizing that my colleague from Malta will later discuss them in detail.

The first three draft resolutions concern respectively the Committee on the Exercise of the

Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat and the special information programme on the question of Palestine. The fourth deals with the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

By the terms of draft resolution L.19, the General Assembly would authorize the Committee to pursue its activities, to make all appropriate arrangements for its programme of work and mobilize the necessary aid and support to help the Palestinian people, while continuing to offer its cooperation and support to the Palestinian non-governmental organizations and other civic organizations.

In the second text, the Secretary-General would be requested to continue to provide all adequate means and resources to the Division for Palestinian Rights, including in the framework of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestine Authority.

In the third draft resolution, on the special information programme on the question of Palestine, the Department of Public Information would be called upon, among other things, to continue the programme until the end of the biennium 2002-2003, to disseminate information about all United Nations activities connected with the question of Palestine and to preserve the appropriate audio-visual documents.

In the fourth draft resolution, "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", the General Assembly would express its deep concern over the tragic events that have taken place since 28 September 2000 in the occupied Palestinian territory. It would fully support the peace process on the basis of the principle of land for peace and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), while, in accordance with the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee, calling for measures taken on the ground by the occupying Power to be immediately reversed. It would call on the parties concerned and the international community to take the necessary initiatives for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, a settlement of the problem of Palestinian refugees and the intensification of economic and technical assistance to the Palestinian people.

I would like to inform the Assembly, following last-minute consultations, of the following revision made to the sixteenth preambular paragraph of this draft resolution so as to make it consistent — and I would even say, in perfect harmony — with the corresponding paragraph of the corresponding resolution adopted last year. That relevant paragraph would read as follows:

> "Expressing its deep concern over the tragic events in Occupied East Jerusalem and the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 28 September 2000, which have resulted in a high number of deaths and injuries, mostly among Palestinian civilians, and concerned also about the clashes between the Israeli armed forces and the Palestinian police and the casualties on both sides".

I think that in this form, the text will be much more balanced for some people.

Such are the content and the spirit of the four draft resolutions that have just been presented to the Assembly. They articulate positions that have been decided, state the mandates agreed upon and describe the programmes that have been approved, which are all of particular importance, especially in the present delicate situation affecting developments on the ground and diplomatic developments regarding the Palestinian question.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, through me, is thus handing in its work, aware in advance that it can rely on the usual solidarity, massive support and almost unanimous voting of the General Assembly.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Walter Balzan of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Balzan (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee, contained in document A/56/35.

In the course of the past year, the Committee continued to carry out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report I am about to present covers developments relating to the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the

Committee from the time of last year's report through 10 October of this year.

Chapter I, the Introduction, outlines the Committee's objectives and its general perspective on the events that have taken place in the course of the year.

Chapters II and III summarize the General Assembly mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee during the year, with special emphasis on the various aspects of the situation on the ground. Also in this chapter, the Committee reviews Israeli actions and policies, and its military response to the intifada; its settlement activity; the situation with respect to Palestinian prisoners; the state of the Palestinian economy; the situation with respect to water resources available to the Palestinians; action by the United Nations system; and the activities and continuing operational difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action aimed at promoting Palestinian rights in the United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council. This section summarizes the communications addressed by the Chairman of the Committee to the Secretary-General and the Presidents of the General Assembly and Security Council. It also includes information on the participation of the Committee Chairman at various international forums.

Section B provides a detailed account of the implementation of the programme of work of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights. It contains information on the dialogue between the Committee and members of the European Union. It also gives an account of the various international meetings organized in the course of the year.

Also summarized in this section are the Committee's cooperation with civil society; the research, monitoring and publications work of the Division for Palestinian Rights; the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine; the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI reviews the action taken by the Department of Public Information in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 55/54 of 1 December 2000.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In this chapter the Committee emphasizes that, more than five decades after the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 181 (II), the Palestinian people is yet to see the promise of its own State fulfilled. The Committee expresses its readiness to persist in efforts to contribute through its varied programme of activities to international endeavours aimed at stopping the violence and putting the parties back on the peace track. The Committee also reiterates that its overriding and fundamental objective and mandate — the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights — will remain key to all its activities.

The Committee joins the international community in expressing grave concern over the policies and actions of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. The Committee reiterates its position of principle that the problem should be resolved based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and other relevant United Nations resolutions and on the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and to their own independent State.

The Committee calls for the immediate and comprehensive implementation of the Mitchell Committee recommendations, as offering the most practicable route back to the peace process. The Committee calls on the co-sponsors of the peace process and on all others concerned to continue to pursue their efforts, looking for innovative approaches that would allow the parties to implement the Mitchell Committee recommendations and to resume their negotiations. The Committee also expresses its belief that stepped up and concrete engagement on the part of key international parties, both regional and extra-regional, is needed more than ever.

The Committee supports the ongoing effort to reconvene the Conference of the High Contracting

Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War in order to ensure respect for the Convention and to provide the necessary protection to the Palestinian people.

The Committee stresses that the United Nations should continue to maintain its permanent responsibility with respect to all aspects of the question of Palestine. It expresses strong belief that both the General Assembly and the Security Council should to do everything in their power to help resolve this five-decade-old conflict. The Committee welcomes and strongly supports the increasingly important and highly instrumental role in the overall peacemaking efforts played in the course of the year by the Secretary-General. The Committee also expresses appreciation to the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his persistent efforts aimed at bringing the parties together and for the important work carried out by his Office of coordinating international assistance to the Palestinian people. The Committee also strongly urges the international donor community to assist the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and to contribute generously to its budget in order to enable the Agency to continue to deliver its vital humanitarian services to the some 3.8 million Palestine refugees registered with it.

The Committee expresses appreciation for the contribution made by non-governmental organizations working untiringly to mobilize solidarity with the Palestinian people, to provide emergency relief under difficult circumstances to the population in the occupied Palestinian territory and to raise international awareness of that people's inalienable rights, in particular the right of return. The Committee emphasizes that its cooperation with the wide network of non-governmental organizations on the question of Palestine will be intensified and focused on issues of common concern. The Committee pledges to continue to review and assess its programme with a view to making it more responsive to developments on the ground and in the peace process. It intends to focus its work in the next year on the question of the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, on efforts to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations and the role of the United Nations therein, and on international assistance to the Palestinian people.

The Committee stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's objectives, and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other informational activities, in particular the further development of the document collection of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine. The Committee also notes the usefulness of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority and requests the Division to continue it.

The Committee expresses the view that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion on the relevant issues. The Committee also requests the programme's continuation, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

Finally, wishing to make its contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee calls on all States to join in that endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

I trust that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in facilitating its deliberations on this important issue.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today, the world is going through a difficult time because of recent events and because of the repulsive resurgence of terrorism, which constitute a threat to international peace and security. This places a tremendous challenge before the world and requires cooperation among all parties to put an end to this scourge, which poses a threat to all humanity. It also poses a threat to the peoples of the world and has become their principal concern. The world has mobilized all its forces to deal with this challenge and its aftermath. For the first time, it is seriously trying to find the causes and factors that led to the creation of an environment propitious for terrorism and for the flourishing of terrorism.

The flagrant State terrorism in which Israel engages has created a poisonous atmosphere in the Middle East and has caused an escalation in incendiary reactions in many parts of the world. The United

Nations must shoulder its responsibility to tackle that evil. Likewise, the standstill in the Middle East peace process has given rise to a number of causes for concern and frustration among the peoples of the region.

The peace process has been at a standstill since the election of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister of Israel. Since taking office, he has brought the process back to square one; he has stopped the negotiations; launched brutal military attacks on Palestinian towns and villages; assassinated civilians and raided houses; destroyed farms and hundreds of thousands of plants; imposed an embargo on towns and villages; and shelled residential areas while encouraging settlements and killing Palestinian residents in cold blood.

The Israeli army is destroying Palestinian institutions and imposing instead Israeli authority, while seeking to incite civil war among Palestinians by sowing discord. The Israeli Government is calling for an end to violence, even while its army is occupying all of the Palestinian territories, engaging in terrorism and carrying out killings and assassinations. It is the army that opened fire after consolidating its occupation — more than 40,000 soldiers have been added to those already present in the West Bank and Gaza — an area of only 5,800 square kilometres. Israeli tanks have invaded towns and villages, which have endured artillery shelling, missile attacks and bombings by American aircraft.

Israel demands that we take responsibility for maintaining public order and security, even while its forces are bombing Palestinian towns and villages and repeatedly invading them, in order to implement their policy of harassment of the civilian population. Israel has put an end to the negotiations and arrogantly calls for peace, which apparently should be established through the use of force. At the same time, it is continuing to establish Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories — settlements that now number more than 150.

It is particularly surprising that Israel is calling on the Palestinian Authority to maintain law and order, because it is well aware that the Palestinian Authority controls only 18 per cent of the Palestinian territories that are now under occupation, whereas Israel, from a security standpoint, controls 80 per cent of that territory, pursuant to the agreements reached. This is compounded by the fact that the Israeli army has destroyed police stations and official and legitimate police headquarters, and has no hesitation whatsoever in assassinating police officers and security officials.

After more than eight years of political negotiations following the Oslo agreement, Israel continues to procrastinate. It continues to occupy all the Palestinian territories and has tightened the siege and blockade on the Palestinian people.

The first intifada of 1991 died down, and a political process was then undertaken thanks to an American initiative, leading to a Peace Conference in Madrid. The Palestine Liberation Organization recognized Israel's right to exist, as a first step towards peaceful coexistence between two independent States, in keeping with internationally binding resolutions.

The Oslo agreement was arrived at, which stipulated that negotiations should be held in two phases: first, a transitional phase, then the decisive and final stage, spanning five years, which were extended for another year in response to a request by the United States, which is the sponsor of the peace process along with European States and other friendly States.

In spite of all this, the peace process is still at square one. It has not achieved the success that was expected of it, and, according to the Oslo agreement, 750,000 Palestinian refugees who were driven from their land during the 1967 war should have been allowed to return to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Israel has spread out its forces throughout 90 per cent of Palestinian territory aside from Jerusalem and the settlements, even though the intention of the agreement was to permit the Palestinian Authority to take over civil administration. That should have happened in the first two years — the transitional period — dissolving Israeli military control over those areas, so as to make it possible, at the beginning of the third year, to embark on negotiations with a view to a final resolution on the questions of Jerusalem, the settlements, refugees, borders and water.

However, Israel has failed to implement any of these agreements. On the contrary, Israeli extremists killed Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, the previous leader of the Government, in order to put an end to the Oslo peace process and requirements. The Government changed with Shimon Peres at its head, and right away the Israeli Government committed its abominable crime at Qan'a, killing hundreds of innocent Lebanese victims

under United Nations protection in southern Lebanon. This is attested to by the United Nations.

Following that, Israeli elections were held and Benjamin Netanyahu became Prime Minister. The new Israeli Government then sought to restart negotiations on various issues, including Hebron, saying that it needed to deal with a number of questions that it claimed affected Israeli security. A security agreement was entered into and was signed by the three parties: the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States, Israeli security and Palestinian security. Mr. Netanyahu rejected that agreement. Subsequently, on 15 January 1998, the Israeli Government took a decision setting out its vital national interests that could not be given up in any agreement, whether transitional or final. They included establishing an eastern security area 80 kilometres long and 16 kilometres wide along the bank of the Jordan River, as well as a western security area, which follows the green line that divides us from Israel. Such security areas were also established around the Israeli settlements, which numbered 148 in 1996. They also took steps to protect their infrastructure, including, in particular, water, electricity and transport. Military bases of strategic importance or necessary for deterrence were also established. Israel also focused on road networks in the west and east, north and south that provide for the security of the settlements as well as the holy places and Jewish historic sites. As a consequence, only little remained of Palestine. This decision on the part of the Israeli Government was just one link in a chain of many such actions designed to establish Israel's policies before Mr. Netanyahu visited Washington in January 1998, with respect to defining the redeployment of Israeli forces in the West Bank.

The Netanyahu Government avoided redeploying its forces, leaving that task to the next Government. In his statement to the General Assembly just a few days ago, the Israeli representative claimed that all occupied territories with the exception of two per cent had been offered to the Palestinian Authority. That is a monstrous falsehood. Israel insisted on retaining its control of Jerusalem and three extensive settlements in the West Bank, while annexing adjacent areas. Israel wanted to set up three early-warning sites in the West Bank so as to facilitate freedom of movement in Palestinian airspace, and also demanded long-term control, 99 years, over areas adjacent to the Dead Sea, together with other details that would have led to a demilitarized Palestinian state under the trusteeship of Israel, with no independence of its own. At the same time, Israel refused to permit Palestinian refugees to return to their land or even to recognize their right to return.

The Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at the Camp David summit, led by former President Bill Clinton, were a failure. A member of the American peace team who assisted President Clinton on Arab-Israeli issues put the blame for the failure on Mr. Barak. He resigned shortly afterwards. An article blaming Barak for the failure of those negotiations was published in *The Washington Post*.

When the Sharon Government came to power, the Israeli army began a ferocious terror campaign, and since then the economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has deteriorated and the national Authority has been undermined by the division of Palestinian territories into blockaded communities and cantons. The Palestinian Authority now has no control over the majority of the Palestinian territories. As a result of the Israeli terror, 74 per cent of Palestinian children under 14 have had to leave school to find work because of the pressure, the stress and the destruction of their schools.

Because of the Israeli terror, the Palestinian National Authority has been unable to provide economic protection against all kinds of exploitation, and as a result of the blockade imposed by Israel, rates of school enrolment and levels of social services and health care have dropped. The agricultural sector has also been hit, because there are is no market for agricultural products. The unemployment rate is now at 40 per cent, while, according to UNRWA, the nutritional needs of 85 per cent of citizens are not being met.

The World Bank report also noted that the poverty rate has risen by 50 per cent in a period of two years, while the legal and judicial systems have almost ceased to function. Palestinian society has become turbulent, with lives being disrupted. In this context, Amnesty International pointed out that the West Bank has been divided into 227 separate zones, making it easier for Israel to dominate those areas and to control movement therein.

All these pressures have led to a resurgence of the intifada and to unrest. It is not easy for the resisting general population to return to previous conditions when they see no promising political future. The Israeli

terror campaign has resulted in the bombing of houses, destruction of social and educational facilities, the killing of children and the destruction of schools and infrastructure, as well as of plants and textile factories and the food sector. All this destruction has exacerbated the intifada, which was proclaimed in order to defend Al-Aqsa Mosque and Islamic and Christian holy sites. It subsequently became an uprising for the independence of the Palestinian population and the liberation of the areas occupied in 1967. The blockade, and the terror inflicted by Israel, have destroyed any mutual trust between Palestinians and Israelis and undermined any feeling of peaceful coexistence. It has led simply to a relationship of confrontation and the rejection of the status quo.

Israel is still seeking to achieve its objectives by means of military force. In the first year of the Al-Aqsa intifada, the Palestinian people offered up 805 martyrs, while more than 31 thousand people were injured, according to official statistics. Some 175 children under the age of 14 are included in those figures.

This means that the rate of child casualty is now 35 per cent. Four hundred and thirty-seven children have been permanently disabled or handicapped and require constant care and rehabilitation. The Palestinian struggle against Israeli terror is the first priority of the Palestinian people today.

The intifada has forced Israel's Arab population to give priority to national issues such as occupation and settlements over other problems, such as social inequities suffered by Arabs vis-à-vis Jews, as a result of the policy of terror carried out by Israel in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Palestinian people have confronted conflicting policies of the Jewish State with respect to the national rights of Palestinian citizens in Israel.

The intifada has also increased the solidarity of the Arab minority in Israel, strengthening its ties with the West Bank and Gaza, and this has further increased the terror Israel directs against its own citizens. In Israel, there is much talk of expelling Palestinians and driving them out. This has reached the point where the Palestinian members of the Knesset face repressive racist practices and lose their parliamentary immunity, which has further compounded the terror directed against Palestinians in Israel. Those who strive to defend democracy should not be misled into making distinctions among Israeli citizens, choosing one over another. Such democracy is not real; it makes distinctions on an ethnic and a religious basis.

Chapter 2 of the partition resolution, General Assembly resolution 181 of 1947, under which Israel was created, states that there shall be no restriction on the freedom of citizens to use any language in private conversation, commercial activities, religion, the press or publications of any kind. The resolution also states that appropriation of Arab lands in the Jewish State or of Jewish lands in the Arab State shall not be permitted.

The partition resolution also provides for the right of citizenship. In Chapter 3, it states that Palestinian citizens living in Palestine outside Jerusalem, and Jews living in Palestine outside Jerusalem, who are not of Palestinian nationality, shall become citizens of the State in which they live and shall enjoy all its civil and political rights merely by recognizing the independence of the State. The State of Israel has not granted citizenship to Palestinians, but Palestinians living on Palestinian land before it was partitioned have obtained it by right from their fathers and grandfathers.

Today, the world is convinced of the need to create a Palestinian State. This has been reflected in the statements of most Members of the United Nations in the course of the General Assembly session of the last few days, including the statement made by the American President, George Bush. This fact empowers us to say that, more than anything else, the withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 is a step that is necessary for the creation of a Palestinian State, to be recognized by the United Nations pursuant to the resolutions of international legitimacy, so that the Palestinian people can exercise their right to self-determination.

The Israelis claim that Israel has not been subjected to international pressure as a result of its practices, policies of assassination and acts of aggression in the region, which enables it to pursue its activities with a view to liquidating the remaining Palestinian resistance. Israeli leaders assert that Palestinian resistance is terrorism and that Israel's security requires these actions against it.

Political representatives of the Palestinian side, citing the Israeli premise that the resistance must be eliminated, state that the international community must bring effective pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to put an end to its terrorist policies and

practices. The sponsors of the peace process should not align themselves with one party against another; they must put pressure on all parties concerned to ensure that they comply scrupulously with the agreements entered into.

We must all recognize that Mr. Sharon has called for the establishment of a Palestinian State on 42 per cent of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967 — that is, he wants to set up a misshapen, divided State under the trusteeship and domination of Israel. The European Union Summit, held in Berlin in 1999, recognized the need to establish a Palestinian State — an autonomous, peace-loving, democratic and viable State — and no one is entitled to use a veto against such a State.

The creation of such a State, as affirmed by the Berlin Declaration, is the best assurance of Israel's security. We take the view that the United Nations should shoulder this responsibility and respond to it by urgently sending international forces to Palestinian territories to replace the Israeli army of occupation, which should, as a first step, withdraw from all the territories occupied in 1967. Likewise, the slogan of an independent State should not remain a dead letter or merely a headline in the press. Practical steps should be taken to implement it so that we can avoid spending another ten years in negotiations simply for the sake of negotiation.

Mr. Colin Powell, in a recent statement, spoke about a Palestinian State and about the occupation and settlements. He said:

> "Israel must be willing to end its occupation, consistent with the principles embodied in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and accept a viable Palestinian State in which Palestinians can determine their own future on their own land and live in dignity and security."

Mr. Powell has also said that Israel must put an end to the settlement policy, end its occupation of Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and revoke all the measures it has taken to blockade Palestinian areas and to restrict the movement of citizens and goods.

All these statements must be translated into practice. Machinery must be established to end the occupation as a first step towards the creation of the Palestinian State. There is a pressing need to define and analyse the details of Mr. Powell's statement in order to determine its objectives and so that we can be confident in the political resolve of the United States Government to ensure a just and final settlement in the Middle East. We expect similar political resolve from the Europeans.

The American position must be translated into concrete action by exerting pressure on Israel to end its occupation, withdraw its army as soon as possible and dismantle the settlements, in accordance with Security Council resolution 465 (1980). This should be followed by the recognition of the Palestinian State within the borders of the territories occupied in 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Building peace and security requires us to address urgent issues around the world, foremost of which is the question of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Any procrastination or hesitation in the search for a settlement to the conflict will make the Arab region and the Middle East as a whole sources of turmoil and disruptive terrorism. Israel's terrorist and expansionist policies and the support it receives from some countries make it impossible to safeguard peace and security in that region. It will doom any political initiative to failure even before it is launched.

The deliberate imbalance of forces in the Middle East should not be allowed to continue or to be the sole factor determining the region's future. Justice, human rights, peace and security should be the objectives of the foreign policies of all States concerned in the region if we are to eliminate the causes of war and terrorism and to restore peace and stability to the peoples of the region.

In conclusion, so long as unjust sanctions are imposed on the fraternal people of Iraq, the situation will continue to be unstable. These sanctions must be ended. Iraq must be restored to its rightful cultural place in the family of nations. That would serve humankind as a whole.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Ever since the creation of the United Nations, the question of Palestine has been discussed under different names; while dozens of recommendations and resolutions have been adopted concerning the illegitimacy of the occupation of the Palestinian territories and the right of the Palestinian people to return to their homes. They have been forced to leave

their lands and should be allowed to return home or to be compensated if they so wish.

Since the creation of the State of Israel, the Middle East has not known a single moment of peace. For over 50 years, peace has eluded the region because of Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories and its pursuit of a policy of expansion. Israel has thus continued to annihilate a people that has been deprived of its rights, despoiled of its annexed lands and seen its property destroyed. Its dignity has been trampled.

The international community has responded to the appeal to combat terrorism. The Security Council was called to meet on an urgent basis and adopted resolutions to fight terrorism, uproot it and drain its resources. That objective is supported by all peace-loving peoples and has been reiterated by all responsible Governments. Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is to be condemned and fought. Occupation is certainly a genuine form of terrorism. Israel, occupying the territory of others by force, conducts official State terrorism by pursuing its extrajudicial policy of assassination, imposing sanctions, closing roads, inhibiting the movement of Palestinians, preventing them from working and condemning them to hunger. All this confirms the aggressive nature of Israel's policy and violates international and humanitarian laws.

It is clear that the violence in the occupied Palestinian territories has emerged essentially from despair over many years of occupation, the heinous practices of the occupying forces and Israel's continued establishment and expansion of settlements, failure to respect its commitments, reluctance to fulfil its obligations and contempt for all agreements and conventions.

The new eruption of violence, instability and insecurity and the absence of peace in the region once again confirm the international dimensions of the Palestinian question and the United Nations responsibility, which will endure until a solution is found to the Palestinian problem and until Israel withdraws from the occupied Lebanese Shebaa farms and the Syrian Golan Heights. This is a political, moral and legal obligation upon the United Nations, requiring it to make every effort to ensure the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and all provisions of international law.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia expresses its support and appreciation for the statement made by United States President George Bush to the General Assembly, in which he maintained that violence against Palestine is the responsibility of all and not just of one party. He also maintained that both Israel and Palestine have the right to exist as two independent States. This is what was confirmed by Secretary of State Powell in his statement in Louisville, Kentucky, and what many world presidents have demanded. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia thus expects the international community to make every effort to help in the resumption of the peace process and in the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — so that Palestinian refugees might return to their homeland, should they wish and those who do not wish to return might be compensated, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) — and in the creation of a Palestinian State, with the Arab city of Jerusalem, occupied since 1967, as its capital.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): On this very day in 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which altered the face of history in the Middle East and divided Palestine, then under the British mandate, into two States: an Arab state and a Jewish state. It also established an independent regime for the city of Jerusalem.

Regrettably, here we are, 54 years since the adoption of that resolution and dozens of other resolutions issued by the Security Council and the General Assembly; yet, the Palestinian people are still deprived of their inalienable rights to self-determination — theirs under the Charter of the United Nations — and of the establishment of their own independent State on their territory.

The historical responsibility of the United Nations with respect to this question, in all its dimensions, is one that will not cease until a lasting, just and comprehensive settlement is reached on all aspects of the problem.

The question of Palestine is currently going through a critical juncture and the Palestinian people face a real dilemma. As if the occupation that has persisted for 34 years were not enough of a dilemma, the Palestinian people have been subjected for the last 14 months to flagrant and continuous Israeli aggression, which has resulted in the death of hundreds and the injury of tens of thousands, as well as in the

severe crippling of the Palestinian economy and property.

One might ask why the brave people of Palestine have to bear this heavy loss of life and property. The answer in our minds is clear. The colonization of this people has gone on too long. Palestinians have grown intolerant of the Israeli military occupation of their land in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. Their hope of attaining a just peace that would relieve them of the nightmare of the occupying Israeli soldiers, who forcefully dictate the will of the occupying Israeli authorities, has been dissipated. Such a peace would lead them out of the cycle of sieges, closures and checkpoints and free them from the harm caused by colonialist Israeli settlers who ravage their land every day, steal their water and burn their harvest and murder their kinsmen under preposterous pretexts.

The Palestinian people are resisting the Israeli occupation for all these reasons. The Palestinian people are also calling for peace for all these reasons. And for all these reasons we, the international community that believes in the purposes and principles of the Charter, must assist the Palestinians in attaining their goal of establishing an independent State on their land.

From Egypt's perspective, there are three key points for the settlement of the Palestinian question. The first lies in the fact that East Jerusalem is now occupied land and is part of occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank and Gaza, from which Israel must completely withdraw. This is enshrined in all relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980) and the relevant General Assembly resolutions, as well as the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The second point is that the colonialist Israeli settlements in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza continue to have devastating effects on the situation of the Palestinians, their security, rights, national aspirations and hopes of establishing their own independent State on their land. Support by the Israeli Government of these settlers and their aggressive and provocative behaviour violates Israel's obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention. In this context, Egypt expresses its satisfaction with the decision of the States parties to the Convention to resume their Conference on 5 December to examine Israel's grave violations of its obligations.

The third point is that resolution of the question of Palestinian refugees should be based on justice, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 194 and other subsequent resolutions, all of which clearly stipulate the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and their right to compensation should they choose not to return.

Israel's disregard for the centrality of these points and their direct impact on the attainment of a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question will only result in prolonging the conflict and exacerbating the violence, causing more casualties on both sides, without attaining a peaceful solution.

We are keenly aware of Israel's continuous attempts to complicate the situation and to waste the many opportunities to achieve peace. In doing so, it resorts to known and obvious methods, and we hope the international community will see them for what they really are. Sometimes Israel resorts to procrastination and delay. At other times it resorts to the imposition of impossible conditions and becomes intransigent in the implementation of those conditions. On many occasions it resorts to provoking the Palestinian side, either by assassinating its activists and its leadership or by repressing demonstrations using live ammunition or other measures that provoke a logical and predictable reaction by the Palestinians. Most important, its goal is to avoid returning to political dialogue, even if the alternative is a situation in which the violence continues and in which Israel will naturally have the upper hand.

Acting under the pretext of achieving security for its citizens, Israel takes a series of repressive measures and invades the territories of the Palestinian Authority, killing people and destroying houses and property. The international community criticizes Israel, then later implores it to withdraw. Israel withdraws some measures; every one applauds that move then forgets what has been inflicted on the Palestinians in terms of destruction and repressive policies that contradict the most basic concepts of human rights.

Egypt believes that the international community and the parties concerned should be aware of this game. It should exert pressure to resume the political dialogue with the aim of ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory and to hasten the process of bringing a Palestinian State into existence, since this is

the only way to guarantee stability and peace in the region.

Through our close observation of the general debate in the General Assembly, held during the second week of November, we can say, from the statements of heads of State and Government and foreign ministers, that the international community has become aware, more than ever, of the importance of the establishment of a Palestinian State. Such a State, whose territory would consist of all Palestinian lands occupied by Israel in 1967 in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza and which will have the elements of continuity and sovereignty and which will uphold the purposes and principles of the Charter and will strive for peace in the region, is the best guarantor of stability in the region and would be a real beginning of a new phase in the history of the Middle East. This was the general opinion, the consensus, in the general debate. This is what we believe is right.

We have no doubts about this international consensus regarding the importance of establishing a Palestinian State with the components that I have mentioned. What is more important now is to translate that international will into an ability to influence the course of events, and thus shape world opinion into a clear and specific mechanism with a time frame that will achieve the desired goal.

In that context, Egypt supports the elements announced on 19 November by the United States Secretary of State as essential for the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Ending Israeli occupation, which is at the core of the problem, will, in essence, end the problem. It is incumbent on both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides to assume the responsibilities entailed in ending the occupation. They must rise up to meet that challenge.

On the other hand, it is important for all the parties concerned to realize that the political efforts being exerted to control the situation in the occupied territories and to return the two sides to political dialogue should not become a temporary exercise whose sole purpose is to restore tranquillity. Egypt believes that any political efforts made at this moment should be aimed at inducing the two parties to reach a final settlement. They should not be limited solely to restoring calm in a political vacuum or to having a political goal without a time frame for its achievement. The political settlement to which Egypt is committed to contribute constructively must take into account the following elements.

The first element is the establishment of a viable Palestinian State on the entire territory of the West Bank and Gaza, with its capital in East Jerusalem. The second is the establishment of good-neighbourly relations and constructive cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians in the context of mutual respect. The third is the provision of security to all parties through balanced arrangements to fulfil their interests.

We had hoped that the discussion of the agenda item on Palestine at this session would be the culmination of many years of the General Assembly's examination of this issue. Yet Israel has once again insisted on prolonging the suffering of the Palestinian people and their quest for achieving their hopes and aspirations for a free, independent and dignified life.

Despite all of this, there is still great hope. The Palestinian State will soon come into being, thereby enshrining the long overdue national dream of the Palestinian people. Egypt will continue to support Palestine and its people with all its capabilities until they fully attain their inalienable and legitimate national rights.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): This important debate on the question of Palestine coincides with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It is an important occasion not only for Palestine but also for those of us who strongly believe in the inalienable right of peoples to self-determination and to free themselves from foreign occupation and oppression. On this Day the international community reaffirms its continued and unwavering support for and solidarity with the long-suffering people of Palestine in their national struggle to achieve their long-cherished goal of establishing an independent and sovereign State.

We are grateful for the extremely useful statement made a few moments ago by Mr. Kaddoumi with his characteristic passion and clarity of analysis.

Every year over the past three decades, we have revisited this subject again and again in the Assembly. It is clear from the debates that have taken place here that there has always been a strong expression of solidarity with the people of Palestine, and clear and unambiguous support for efforts towards a political solution of the Palestinian question through dialogue

and negotiation. Sadly, however, neither those debates nor the consideration of the issue in the Security Council — including the adoption of its resolution 1322 (2000) of 7 October 2000 — have had any impact at all on the situation. It is regrettable that in spite of the fact that there have been more than 800 Palestinians killed and about 20,000 Palestinians wounded since September last year, the Organization, and especially the Security Council, has failed to take any significant action to bring about an end to the violence. This tragic state of affairs is likely to continue, resulting in even more deaths, injury and destruction, unless immediate efforts are made to end the violence. The international community, particularly the Organization and the Security Council, in fulfilment of their responsibility under the Charter, must act, and act promptly.

In his address to the General Assembly, President Yasser Arafat said that

> "International sponsorship of the Middle East peace process is the only true guarantee for efforts by the international community to make peace an established reality in our region. The absence of international involvement in this conflict — in the serious search for a solution to the Palestinian question, in accordance with justice and the principles of international law — will push the region back into a spiral of violence, confrontation and bloodshed and could make the situation more explosive and fragile." (*A/56/PV.46, pp. 33-34*)

President Arafat's words must be seriously heeded. My delegation fully shares his views and underscores the essential need for the international community to be actively involved in efforts to bring the peace process back on track, and to effectively move it forward.

Malaysia deplores all forms of violence, whether by individuals, groups or State authorities. It gives us no pleasure to criticize any Member State of the Organization, but, in the face of the ongoing violence, we must condemn the continued disproportionate and excessive use of force by Israeli security forces against Palestinian civilians, and the collective punishment of the Palestinian people through the prohibition of the movement of persons, goods and resources, closures and blockades, the demolition of houses, the bulldozing of olive trees, extrajudicial killings of targeted Palestinians and other forms of political and severe economic restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people. Those actions constitute grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is applicable to all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. We Members of the Organization have a clear responsibility to ensure that the provisions of the Convention and other relevant principles and norms of international law are respected, and that innocent civilians living under Israeli occupation are protected.

Specific measures must be taken to put an end to the violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people. Palestinian leaders have asked for an international mechanism to monitor the situation on the ground, thereby ensuring the safety of unarmed civilians. That proposal deserves the unqualified support of the international community, as it would have the immediate effect of defusing the explosive situation on the ground and instilling confidence between the two sides.

The General Assembly, being very concerned about the situation on the ground, should urge the Security Council to intensify efforts to end the spiral of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory; to examine the many constructive ideas that have been brought before the Council, including, in particular, the idea of an international presence or mechanism on the ground; and to arrive at a final consensus in the Council at an early date in order to calm the situation.

My delegation calls on Israel to return to the negotiating table and conduct its negotiations with the Palestinian side in good faith, dictated by the need to end and resolve the issue once and for all, in the best interests of all concerned. Since a political settlement through dialogue is the only realistic solution to the conflict, it is in the interest of Israel itself to revive the peace track and deal seriously and constructively with the Palestinian leadership as it finds it, not as it wishes it to be. The peace process must be a serious one which will deal with all the core issues and must lead to a genuine peace settlement. It should not be a charade of going through the motions of a peace process to appease critics while more and more settlements are illegally constructed in Palestinian lands.

In order to create between the parties the confidence necessary for a resumption of the political dialogue, all past agreements between the two parties must be upheld and steps must be taken to effect their

early implementation. As immediate first steps to end the violence and to build mutual confidence, there must be a serious implementation of the Mitchell report and the Tenet plan. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the appointment of General Anthony Zinni as the United States special adviser to the Secretary of State for the Middle East and wishes him every success in his difficult assignment of brokering a new ceasefire between the parties. It is our hope that his efforts will not meet with yet more impediments.

My delegation is confident that the Assembly will vote in favour of the draft resolutions, thereby sending to Israel yet again a clear message of the overwhelming wish of the international community for an early end to the conflict through dialogue and negotiations, not through its current policies of more military actions or the continued oppression of the Palestinian people. Support for the draft resolutions would also be a further manifestation of Member States' continued solidarity with, and support for, the just struggle of the Palestinian people on this important Day of Solidarity. For its part, Malaysia reiterates its firm, consistent and unqualified support for the Palestinian leadership and people in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination, including the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to reiterate the solidarity of the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the Palestinian people and their just and sacred cause. We hope that the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People this year will mark the beginning of the complete restoration of the rights of the Palestinian nation.

The second half of the twentieth century was marked by the struggle of the Palestinian people for the exercise of their fundamental and natural rights. During these years, the Palestinian people were uprooted from their homeland, dispersed into exile and stripped of their rights. The occupying Power resorted to all possible means to negate their very existence, but the question of the Palestinians and their just and heroic struggle remains at the forefront for the international community and at the core of the conflict in the Middle East.

For the last 50 years, Palestinians have woken up every day to the ruthless atrocities, occupation, suppression, repression and carnage perpetuated by Israel. However, the recent 14-month period which followed the provocative events at Al-Haram Al-Sharif in September 2000 was one of the most violent periods in the history of the Palestinian struggle. During this period, the Israeli regime, in pursuit of its bloody, campaign and aggressive policy against the defenceless Palestinian people, employed more vicious measures. Hundreds of Palestinians were killed and several thousand injured. The Israeli regime used different kinds of heavy and sophisticated weapons in an excessively harsh and indiscriminate manner. By using fighter aircraft, they even expanded the scale of their brutality against unprotected Palestinian targets beyond what could have been imagined. Their security apparatus resorted to the targeted extrajudicial assassination of Palestinians, claiming the lives of innocent people, including children. Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails have also been subjected to psychological pressure and physical torture, in flagrant violation of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Also, the Israeli policy of settlement activities in Palestinian territories has been expanded. The number of settlers increased by thousands during the year. Several hundred Palestinian residential buildings were demolished and several thousand buildings shelled. At the same time, armed settler groups set Palestinian properties on fire in an attempt to occupy their land, and the policy of Judaization of Palestinian cities, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, was accelerated.

The incursion of heavily armed Israeli forces into Palestinian areas constitutes yet another heavy-handed criminal act carried out by a Government armed to the teeth against a defenceless population. Such incursions further exacerbated the plight of Palestinians and added to the destruction, loss of lives and instability in the whole region.

Also, the Palestinian economy, as a result of various restrictive policies of Israel, dangerously disintegrated, and protracted closures of the occupied Palestinian territories have had a disastrous effect on the Palestinian economy, as well as on individual Palestinian households.

Recent events have further demonstrated the need for an international intervention with a view to

protecting defenceless Palestinian civilians from ever-increasing atrocities at the hands of Israelis, and the international community has a responsibility to put an end to this.

Today it seems that the international community has finally recognized that the situation in Palestine is the source of many political and security problems that could at any moment endanger global peace and security. It is now clearer than ever that the continuation of the occupation of the Palestinian territories, Syrian Golan and Lebanese Shaba' is the principal cause of the tension and instability in the region.

We have to seize this opportunity to advance the cause of Palestine. We sincerely hope that the new statements from Western countries will be followed up with concrete actions, thus putting an end to the continued suffering of the Palestinian people for more than half a century. It is time for the international community to stand by the Palestinians more resolutely than ever before and render its full support for the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. An end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and full restoration of all legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to return to their homeland, are the main pillars of any solution.

I would like to close by reaffirming that the Middle East crisis and the issue of Palestine can be settled only through the recognition of historical as well as current realities in the region, the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian nation, in particular, the right of return, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and the participation of all original inhabitants of Palestine, including Muslims, Jews and Christians, in determining their own political system in a democratic referendum.

Mr. Benmehidi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Our consideration of the question of Palestine is taking place this year in the context of a disturbing deterioration of the situation in the occupied territories, which has been marked, on one hand, by the subjection of the civilian Palestinian population to unspeakable repression by the Israeli occupying forces and, on the other hand, by the reaffirmed resolve of the international community to give new impetus to the peace process, which has been at a standstill for several months now, and to arrive at a just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The fact is that Israeli repression has reached a climax these past weeks with the increase in targeted assassinations, the destruction of houses, repeated military incursions in zones under Palestinian control, illegal closure and occupation of Palestinian institutions and properties, the use of heavy artillery against unarmed peoples and systematic recourse to violence, sowing fear and despair among the civilian population.

At the same time, the Israeli Government is pursuing an unrelenting daily policy of territorial expansion, in violation of United Nations resolutions and is turning a deaf ear to appeals by the international community to freeze its settlement policy.

In sum, the successive incidence of breach of commitments undertaken, daily repression and increase in crisis situations — in short, the most damaging policy possible pursued by Israel — have ended up by overtaking the peace process, which had already broken down, and the Middle East now finds itself closer than ever to a general confrontation.

Given this situation, it is urgent that every step be taken to avoid further aggravation, which would be fatal to the peace process. In this respect, the United Nations should bring all its moral and political weight to bear to compel Israel to scrupulously comply with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relating to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and abide by the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council. In this connection, the meeting of the Conference of High Contracting Parties, to be held on 5 December next year, is particularly important.

The Assembly, which has always consistently reaffirmed in the past its support for the just cause of the Palestinian people and its inalienable rights to self-determination and independence, must assume its responsibilities and redress the historical injustice committed against the Palestinian people, so that international law and justice finally prevail in this region of the world.

For this to happen, the United Nations should act as a catalyst and facilitator for the initiatives under way so that the efforts of the various partners in the peace process can coalesce and lead to a return to calm and

create conditions favourable for resuming negotiations. In this respect, Algeria welcomes the statement made on 10 November in this Hall before this Assembly by Mr. George Bush, President of the United States of America, in favour of the creation of a Palestinian State, with internationally recognized borders. This position expressed by the highest authority among the main sponsors of the peace process is, in our view, both a positive development and a significant breakthrough capable of relaunching the peace process and bringing about the early settlement of the Israel-Arab conflict that we have awaited for so long.

Any just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine should be based on international law, as embodied in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the respect by Israel of the commitments undertaken in the framework of the peace process, in particular the principle of "land for peace" agreed to in Madrid. Such a settlement must make it possible to achieve the national rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to the establishment of an independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

To this end, and in order to relaunch the dialogue, we consider it necessary to start from a common basis, accepted by and acceptable to all. We already have such a basis, in the form of the recommendations contained in the Mitchell Report, whose pertinence and validity the international community, on the whole, has commended. Based on a balanced approach, this report provides for a series of measures aimed at ensuring the relaunching of the peace process, which has long been at a standstill. These measures relate to putting an end to acts of violence, freezing settlements, restoring trust and resuming negotiations. The Assembly should now call for the full and urgent implementation of its recommendations.

It is essential, in this respect, for an impartial monitoring mechanism to be quickly established on the ground, which would be in keeping with a follow-up to the Mitchell Report. It is also urgent and indispensable for the Security Council to deploy international observers as soon as possible in the occupied territories so as to ensure the protection of the Palestinian civilian population.

Algeria, which is now more than ever convinced that peace is a strategic option, and therefore remains firmly committed to a peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the conflict in the Middle East, of which the question of Palestine is the key element, would like to reiterate here its full support and its active solidarity with the fraternal Palestinian people in its fight to recover its freedom and to establish an independent and sovereign State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): The situation in the Middle East continues to be a matter of grave concern to the international community. Acts of violence flare up, inflict destruction, damage property, cause great loss of life and generate deep sorrow and desire for revenge among both the Palestinian and Israeli people. The Lao People's Democratic Republic expresses its concern over the current situation in the region and strongly condemns these acts of violence and the excessive use of force against the Palestinians. We also repeat our call for the complete and unconditional implementation of the ceasefire agreement of 17 October 2000, the Mitchell recommendations and relevant United Nations resolutions, so that the peace process could be brought back on track and an eventual solution to the Palestinian problem secured once and for all.

It is gratifying for my delegation to note that, during the past year, the international community has witnessed some welcome developments in the Middle East towards the resumption of the peace process, in particular the Mitchell committee's recommendations, the September meeting at Gaza International Airport between the heads of the two sides and the October statement by the United States President concerning the creation of a Palestinian State. Regrettably, the earnest hope of the world community has been ruined recently by bloody clashes and incidents. The situation on the ground is still fragile, and the existing peace and security remain in jeopardy.

The best way, in our opinion, to end violence before it spreads even further is to help the interested parties move as fast as possible towards a final agreement. In this regard, the international community must redouble its efforts to do everything possible to assist the two parties to bring a rapid end to the current violence so that hope can be restored to both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

We renew our call to the world community to continue exerting political and diplomatic efforts that would support and promote negotiations between

Palestine and Israel with the aim of finding a just and comprehensive settlement to the ongoing conflict. As known to all, the Palestinian people have suffered far too long, and as the question of Palestine is at the heart of the Middle East problem, no solution in the Middle East can be envisaged that does not fully take into account the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. Only when the Palestinian issues are resolved in a just and reasonable manner and all the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are restored will Palestine and Israel enjoy real and lasting peace.

In this context, my delegation wishes to reaffirm the Lao People's Democratic Republic's unwavering support for the Palestinian people under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in their struggle to exercise their inalienable rights, in particular, the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian state in their homeland, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, while, of course, respecting Israel's right to exist.

It is true that the road to peace is not an easy one, as numerous obstacles do remain. However, this cause of peace is just and represents the ardent hope of the peoples in the region to live together, to cooperate and to co-exist peacefully. It is therefore, incumbent upon us all to do whatever we possibly can to stop the ongoing conflict and ensure that the peace process in the Middle East can be put back on track. We firmly believe that dialogue, rather than confrontation, will always remain the surest path to peace and security, and the question of Palestine can be resolved only by peaceful means in accordance with the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter.

Let us wish all the best to the two parties directly concerned, Israel and the PLO, in their efforts to resolve the current crisis and open up ways towards the establishment of a just and durable peace in this volatile region.

Mr. Koonjul (Mauritius): My delegation is pleased to participate in the debate on agenda item 41, entitled "Question of Palestine", in the General Assembly today, coinciding with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On this very important day, I wish to reiterate the continued support of the Government and people of Mauritius for the people of Palestine in their quest for achieving their inalienable rights to self-determination and statehood.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Ambassador Papa Louis Fall, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to the members of the Committee for the report contained in document A/56/35. Since its establishment in 1975, the Committee has spared no efforts in working relentlessly towards the implementation of the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

Today, at this very critical stage in Israeli-Palestinian relations, the Committee's role takes an added dimension in advancing the Palestinian cause. At this juncture, the Palestinian people need, more than ever before, the continued engagement of the international community in the search for peace in the Middle East.

As pointed out this morning by Ambassador Patricia Durrant, President of the Security Council, at the solemn meeting held to commemorate today's event, the question of Palestine first came on the agenda of the General Assembly over half a century ago. In 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which provided for the partition of Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish. More than 50 years later we are still struggling to see the full implementation of that resolution.

Today's commemoration is yet another grim reminder that the second State, the Arab State provided for by the partition resolution, is yet to be established. The fact that the Palestinian people have still not been provided with a homeland constitutes a gross injustice, not only to them but also to humankind in general. It is morally unacceptable that what has been given to one people is still being denied another. Such a situation has stifled the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for too long, and we understand their feelings and sympathize fully with them.

To add insult to injury, the Middle East peace process has been subjected both intentionally and unintentionally to several blows. During the past year the situation on the ground has deteriorated beyond anyone's imagination. Hundreds of civilians, mostly Palestinians, have been killed; tens of thousands, including hundreds of children, have been wounded and permanently disabled. The economic blockade imposed by Israel has further exacerbated the suffering

of the Palestinian people. Israel's policy of the targeted extrajudicial killing of Palestinian activists and political leaders, the indiscriminate and excessive use of force, the occupation of Orient House and other Palestinian offices by Israel and the frequent Israeli incursions into areas under full Palestinian control have all seriously undermined decades of hard-won gains.

Mauritius has on several occasions unequivocally condemned those acts both in the Assembly and in the Security Council, and today we once again call upon Israel to exercise utmost restraint in all its actions and to stop all acts of provocation, including the expansion of settlement activities.

We equally condemn all acts of terrorism, which have deepened the sense of anger, bitterness and suspicion between the two parties and at the same time have contributed to derailing the peace process. We appeal to both sides to stop the cycle of violence and to give a chance to peaceful negotiations, because Mauritius believes that, despite all the tragic events, peace in the Middle East is not as elusive as we might think. In fact, these events, as well as those of 11 September, should strengthen the resolve of the international community to pursue its efforts to take forward the peace process and to build upon the various milestones reached in the protracted Middle East peace process beginning with the Camp David Accords in 1978, through the Madrid Peace Conference and the Oslo Accords, to the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings of last year.

Time has been lost. But how much more time and how many more lives must be lost before the two sides decide to end the current stalemate? The physics of politics has always proved that the middle position always prevails over the extremes. It is therefore imperative that the political leaders return without further delay and without preconditions to the negotiating table and devise means for the unconditional implementation of the recommendations contained in the Mitchell report. That report, which has been accepted by both parties, remains the only viable option available today and contains all the ingredients for reviving the peace process. The report offers a balanced, sensible and coherent foundation for overcoming the current stalemate. We call upon the two sides immediately to seize the valuable opportunities provided by the Mitchell report and the ceasefire agreement brokered by the United States — the Tenet plan — to move out of the impasse.

At this critical juncture in the Middle East crisis, it is imperative that all parties concerned, the co-sponsors of the peace process, the European Union and the international community at large exert all necessary efforts to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the Mitchell report. We are thankful to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan for his sustained efforts and determination to put an end to the violence and to work towards the resumption of the peace process.

We are reassured by the recent statement by President Bush pledging to work towards the day when both Israel and Palestine will live peacefully together within secure and recognized borders, as called for by various Security Council resolutions. We also welcome the statement made some 10 days ago by the United States Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell, outlining the United States vision for the Middle East and a United States pledge of greater involvement in the search for peace in the region. The new dynamics in world politics and the renewed efforts of the United States Government in favour of a sovereign Palestinian State will, in our view, give new impetus to the peace process. It is our strong hope that the Palestinian people will soon achieve their cherished goal of statehood while Israel enjoys all the security it so deserves.

Ms. Iyer (India): Today we solemnly commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Government and the people of India once again reaffirm their solidarity with the people of Palestine, who have struggled bravely for the past five decades to attain their inalienable rights.

India's bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people have been strengthened and reinvigorated with the passage of time. Since the time of Mahatma Gandhi, India's support for the Palestinian cause has been strong and unwavering. Starting with our vote against the partition of Palestine, through India's 1974 recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and our recognition of the State of Palestine in 1988, to the opening of our representative office to the Palestinian National Authority in 1996, India has consistently stood by the Palestinian people. India has actively supported peace initiatives in the Middle East. India is committed to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the

principle of land for peace. We support the inalienable and legitimate right of the Palestinian people to a homeland as well as the right of all States of the region, including Israel and Palestine, to exist peacefully within secure and internationally recognized boundaries.

We remain convinced that, under President Arafat's leadership, the Palestinian people stand on the threshold of a new era wherein their national aspirations, for which they have struggled for so long, can be realized. We remain vitally interested in peace, development and stability in the region and are ready to assist in whatever way we can.

When the Madrid Conference was convened and the Oslo process initiated, India shared the optimism of the international community that the time frame, the road maps and the mutual obligations of the Israelis and the Palestinians would be respected and that there would be moves towards final status talks to settle complicated issues such as Jerusalem, refugees and borders. However, the Camp David and Taba talks did not lead to the culmination of the Oslo Accords, and indeed many of the interim obligations remain unfulfilled. The resulting frustration of the Palestinian people has found expression in the intifada.

The tragic cycle of violence that has engulfed the Middle East region since September last year has been damaging to peace and stability. It is a source of deep concern to all of us. That violence has led to the most regrettable loss of hundreds of lives and has injured thousands. It has derailed the Middle East peace process and has severely dented the trust and confidence between the parties without which there cannot be forward movement on negotiated agreements about interim and final status issues. The longer the violence continues, the greater the danger that extremist and radical tendencies will be strengthened. In turn, such a development would be detrimental to a peaceful resolution. That is why it is essential to exercise utmost restraint, to eschew violence and counter-violence and to shun all acts that could destabilize the peace process.

An important issue that has vitiated the atmosphere has been the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. The rapid growth and expansion of settlements and the establishment of new ones since the signing of the Oslo accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority undermines mutual confidence as well as the credibility of the peace process. We trust that Israel will respect the overwhelming sentiment of the international community in favour of a freeze on all settlement activity.

We believe that the Mitchell report and the Tenet plan are means to enable the transition from the current situation of intifada-related strife to the negotiating table, where the modalities of ending the Israeli occupation and final-status issues must be resolved. Moreover, the implementation of the Mitchell report should not be impeded by unrealistic conditions. India supports the G-8 statement on international monitoring.

India has engaged itself continuously with the leaders of the region in a bid to encourage moves towards peace. We were honoured to host a visit this year by President Arafat.

The plight of Palestinian refugees living in the camps scattered in the West Asian region is distressing, and both sides need to address this issue as part of the final- status negotiations, with the active engagement and support of the international community. India stands ready to assist the Palestinian people in their hour of need.

There is a general recognition that, together with political support for the peace process, there is a need to focus on the multifaceted tasks of nation-building. The fledgling Palestinian National Authority requires generous assistance, particularly in the fields of health, education and the creation of employment. Infrastructure development is an area of critical importance. The challenges confronting the people of Palestine are also challenges for the international community and merit its urgent attention and support.

An unfortunate accompaniment of this current phase of violence is the severe impoverishment of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Such human impoverishment, in such a short span of time, negates years of sustained assistance by the international community to help build the human-resource potential of the Palestinian people and the economic infrastructure in Palestinian Authority areas. This aspect needs to be addressed on an urgent basis. India joins the international community's call for an immediate easing of restrictions on the Palestinians. Funds that are due to the Palestinian Authority should be made available.

India remains ready to engage with the Palestinian National Authority and the Palestinian people in their reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Two Indian-aided projects in the Gaza Strip — the Jawaharlal Nehru Library at Al-Azhar University and the Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College in Deir Al-Balah — have been completed. India has sent medical supplies for use by hospitals in West Bank and Gaza. Very soon a consignment of hospital equipment will be shipped to Gaza. The Indian Government has a substantial ongoing programme for human- resources development for the Palestinian National Authority. We are ready to do more.

While it is incumbent on all of us to work together to advance the peace process in West Asia, ultimately it is the parties themselves that have to shoulder the major responsibility for achieving a permanent and lasting solution. A spirit of accommodation and political will must imbue the negotiation process. The parties must harness all their energies to achieve a just and comprehensive peace.

Mr. De Ruyt (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area — Iceland — align themselves with this statement.

Since our debate last year the situation in the Middle East has worsened considerably. The bloodshed and the provocations have increased, both in Israel and in the occupied territories. They have aggravated an already alarming situation and have rendered ineffective the international community's efforts to secure the relaunch of a political process.

On the ground, there seems to be no end to the cycle of violent acts and reprisals. Since September last year, the conflict has taken the lives of nearly 1,000 people and left thousands injured. Innocent civilians on both sides have been affected by the confrontations, the terror, the provocations and the violence. People are suffering; they cannot remain hostage to the conflict indefinitely. The lack of any political perspective encourages further confrontation and plays into the hands of the extremists. But there are no winners in this chain of confrontation and violence. The parties must get back to the path of dialogue and negotiation without delay.

Six months ago, a diagnosis was made, and a remedy was suggested. On 22 May the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee submitted its report. That report and its realistic and balanced recommendations enjoy wide international support. The European Union supports them unreservedly, and both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority have accepted them. These recommendations form the most suitable basis for finding a way out of the crisis.

The broad lines of a way out do exist, therefore, but the decisions to be taken require political will and courage. We call upon the Israelis and the Palestinians to ensure the full and unconditional implementation of the Mitchell report and of the Tenet plan, especially as regards the cessation of violence and an immediate freeze on settlement activity. Only in this way will it be possible to build peace between the parties. Moreover, a political perspective must accompany conciliation and be the driving force behind it.

The European Union calls on the Palestinian Authority to do all it can to halt the violence against Israel, and more particularly to arrest and bring before the courts the perpetrators, instigators and sponsors of terrorist acts. It also calls on upon it to combat incitement to violence in all its forms.

The Union condemns the Israeli army's reoccupation of areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority and takes note of the withdrawal of its forces from Area A. It recalls the need for an immediate lifting of the closures in the Palestinian territories. It also recalls that extra-judicial executions are illegal under international law and unacceptable, and it calls on Israel to exercise the greatest restraint in the use of military force. Finally, we call on the Israeli Government to facilitate the access of humanitarian staff and assistance to the Palestinian population.

One of the measures identified by the Mitchell report to restore trust between the parties is a recommendation calling for a total freeze on settlement activity, including the natural growth of existing settlements. In the Union's view, these activities are prejudicial to the outcome of the negotiations and are contrary to international law. Moreover, this policy will

not assist the search for a just and lasting peace. It is imperative that it be ended immediately.

The European Union continues to be in favour of the setting up of a third-party monitoring mechanism, in agreement with the parties, so as to help them overcome their differences and the obstacles they encounter in their efforts at reconciliation. It remains willing to contribute to such a mechanism.

The parties must seize the opportunity offered by the Mitchell recommendations to resume negotiations. In this connection, the Union shares the vision and welcomes the commitment of the President of the United States, George W. Bush, in his search for peace in the Middle East, based on the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and on the peaceful coexistence of the two States, Israel and Palestine, as he himself outlined to the Assembly on 10 November and as Secretary of State Colin Powell reiterated in Kentucky. This should allow us to work even more closely together. That commitment opens the way to a ceasefire and the resumption of political negotiations so as to achieve a comprehensive agreement putting an end to this historic conflict. After more than a year of violence, it is clear that only negotiation, taking into consideration the expectations of both parties, is capable of bringing about a definitive resolution of the question of Palestine.

The European Union is convinced that the framework of the peace process offers the only reasonable hope for putting an end to this conflict. Indeed, there is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians and Israelis want to live in peace.

Many stages of the peace process have been completed, despite the various difficulties and obstacles. The gains must be preserved and, more importantly, brought to fruition. A just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine must be based on the principles of the Madrid Conference, in particular the principle of land for peace, and on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Agreements have also been signed by the parties, leading to real results on the ground, and progress has been made in earlier discussions and negotiations.

In the current circumstances, the European Union calls on both parties to do their utmost at the political, security, economic and social levels to return to the path of negotiation, without prior conditions and with the aim of satisfying the legitimate expectations of the peoples in the region, as expressed at the Madrid Conference in 1991.

For the Palestinians, this means the establishment of a viable and democratic State and an end to the occupation of their territories. On the basis of the declarations it adopted at Berlin and New York, the Union reaffirms that the Palestinians have an unqualified right to self-determination, including the right to create an independent State. For the Israelis, it means the right to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. The European Union has always recognized Israel's legitimate concerns in this area, and wishes to stress its commitment with regard to Israel's security.

Above all, it is up to the parties themselves to seek peace, through a process of negotiating all elements that have to be settled in the framework of permanent status discussions. This involves, in particular, finding a just and viable solution to the issues of Jerusalem and refugees, and the provision of economic support for the Palestinian population.

The European Union — reaffirms its readiness to assist — in close cooperation with all parties concerned, in particular the United States of America, the Russian Federation and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as well as the regional partners, including Jordan and Egypt in finding a definitive solution to the conflict.

Mr. Lancry (Israel): For the first time in years, we are debating the question of Palestine amid a seemingly hopeless cycle of violence that has turned back the clock to a more desperate period. The story of Israel is told through the histories of its many diverse people, their many countries of origin and their many languages, religions and cultures. But it is also told through the history of our wars, of our many sons and daughters who have fallen in defence of the right of the Jewish people to self-determination and our right to live in peace and security.

In the past decade, we — both the Israelis and the Palestinians — have taken bold steps to write a new chapter in our history. The hopes of Israelis soared when the Israeli Government, under the leadership of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, pioneered the Oslo peace process, and Chairman Arafat recognized Israel's right to exist, renounced the use of violence

and terrorism and entered into negotiations aimed at bringing about a final settlement to our conflict.

Over the past year, those hopes have been damaged; but they have not been destroyed. Even as we live with the looming threat of terrorism, and even as Israel is forced to take extraordinary measures to protect its civilians from deadly violence, the Israeli people have not lost hope that we may yet achieve a genuine and lasting peace with our Palestinian partners.

In this connection, we welcome the renewed American efforts to assist us in the most urgent task at hand: bringing about a complete and unconditional cessation of violence. We are hopeful that this new initiative will be a successful one. Israel is committed to doing all that it can to work with our Palestinian partners to restore calm and quiet to the region. We are confident that if this can be achieved, it will create the conditions necessary for a resumption of negotiations.

We are long past the time for accusations and recriminations. Our efforts to usher in a new era of peace and coexistence in the Middle East will be forever hindered if we focus exclusively on the pain and misery of the past. We must set our sights on a future of peace, prosperity, coexistence, security and opportunity for all.

As for the Palestinians, they must come to terms with the reality of Israel as a sovereign Jewish State. As American Secretary of State Powell said recently,

> "Palestinians must eliminate any doubt, once and for all, that they accept the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish State".

The violence of the past year has exacted a heavy price, but it has provided nothing in return. The fact that hundreds of Palestinians and Israelis have been killed and thousands more maimed and wounded has caused us unspeakable pain and heartbreak, but has not brought the Palestinians any closer to their goals. We must recognize that nothing positive can emerge if we continue down this road.

Just last week we were again reminded of the tragedy of conflict, of the indiscriminate and cruel ways in which it attacks those who are most vulnerable. Israel deeply regrets the tragic death of five Palestinian children from the Al-Astal family, and we express our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims. This is a poignant example of how pain has no frontiers and of how the sorrow and grief of the Palestinian people permeates us, as Israelis, as well.

These senseless deaths must not be taken as inspiration for revenge, however, but must serve to reaffirm our belief that only by silencing our weapons can we create a better future for our people.

In the last few days Israelis have been given yet more reasons to grieve. It is with a heavy heart that I inform the Assembly that just a few hours ago — four hours ago, to be precise — Palestinian terrorists detonated an explosive charge on a public bus near the town of Pardes Hannah. This abhorrent terrorist bombing resulted in the deaths of three Israelis and seriously wounded several others, some of them listed in critical condition.

Today's bus bombing is the fourth lethal Palestinian terrorist attack in two days. Just this morning, Palestinian terrorists killed another Israeli commuter in a drive-by shooting. On Tuesday, Palestinian terrorists unleashed a deadly fusillade in the Israeli city of Afula and another later in the day in Gush Katif. These attacks claimed the lives of two women and one young man, and wounded several others, including a two-year-old girl.

These indiscriminate acts of terrorism on innocent, unassuming civilians are indefensible both morally and legally. The Palestinian speaker in today's debate, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, called for an end to the international terrorism. Mr. Kaddoumi should begin by bringing an end to the Palestinian terrorism that has taken root in Palestinian territory, corrupted the peace process and caused the death of scores of innocents on both sides.

The Palestinians often speak of their strategic choice for peace, but their tactical choice is one of terrorism. Peace and terrorism cannot coexist. The Palestinians cannot call for a ceasefire and the implementation of the Mitchell report and the Tenet agreement while continuing to permit the perpetration of deadly acts of terrorism against Israel.

We expect that this week's attacks will finally move the Palestinian leadership to do more than merely issue the occasional condemnation when it is politically convenient to do so. We expect that action will finally be undertaken, in accordance with signed commitments, to bring Palestinian terrorists to justice

and that the Palestinian leadership will stop supporting, encouraging, inciting and harbouring terrorists.

Both the shooting spree in Afula and today's bus bombing occurred in northern Israel, just a few kilometres from the City of Jenin, from which Israeli forces withdrew just days ago. Israel's presence in Jenin was not something that we had sought, but was rather a direct result of the Palestinian failure to fulfil its commitments. The unrelenting violence and terrorism of the past year have imposed upon Israel a weighty responsibility that requires us to undertake preventive measures in defence of our citizens.

On his journey to sow death and devastation, a suicide bomber, or the mastermind behind him, has already implacably sentenced scores of innocent civilians — children and adults — to death and misery without any judicial procedure. No effort is made to determine guilt or innocence; there is no consideration of due process and principles of justice. Their murderous ways are indiscriminate and merciless.

The only way to prevent such an unbearable outcome is to bring justice to the suicide bombers and those who send them. These are not actions that we enjoy, but they are nonetheless indispensable if we are to carry out our basic duty to ensure the safety and security of our citizens. Moreover, such actions would be entirely unnecessary and would cease completely if the violence were brought to an end.

Indeed, ending the violence is the only way we can move forward. Only a recognition of the futility of war can reopen the door to negotiations. That door was first opened by Egypt and later by Jordan, after their courageous leaders decided to pursue the path of peace. The benefits of quiet borders, increases in tourism and trade, and greater prosperity are the results of a peace agreement predicated on a rejection of violence and a commitment to dialogue.

Chairman Arafat, too, recognized the uselessness of violent confrontation in his letter of 9 September 1993, in which he renounced the use of violence and terror, recognized Israel's right to live in peace and security, and committed the Palestinian people to the peace process. This commitment was the fundamental basis for the Oslo process and must be the centrepiece of any final agreement reached between the two sides.

Indeed, the whole notion of a peace process is fundamentally at odds with violence and incitement. True peace cannot be achieved if leaders negotiate a settlement at the same time as they prime their people for war. Peace requires a culture of peace, the end of contempt and defamation, and the end of incitement and confrontation. Peace requires a language of peace, expressed in the way leaders address their nations, teachers teach their students and religious leaders inspire their followers.

It is our belief that such a peace is still attainable. But it can be realized only at the negotiating table, and we can reach the negotiating table only when Chairman Arafat reaffirms his commitment of 9 September 1993, not only in word but also in deed.

We live in a world of extraordinary change and opportunity. Cooperation is replacing conflict as the primary mode of interaction between States in every corner of the world. This trend offers us the means to introduce a new era of cooperation in the Middle East based on mutual recognition, reconciliation and the right of all peoples to live in peace and security.

The Mitchell report, the Tenet ceasefire agreement and the Powell initiative provide us with a road map out of the present quagmire and towards a process that will open the Middle East to the opportunities of our time. Israel is committed to these frameworks, and we will work concertedly with all parties towards their realization.

It is my sincerest hope that our Palestinian partners will join us in seizing the opportunity before us. We must embrace it, for the future of our region and the well-being of our children depend on it. The coming year should be a year free from the heartbreak and tragedy of the past, one that will finally bring that long-sought peace to the peoples of the Middle East.

Mr. Requeijo Gual (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Once again, we have come together in this Assembly to address the question of Palestine. Precisely one year ago, as we celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we expressed our profound concern at the outset of a new and deplorable chapter in the history of assaults against and violations of the most fundamental rights of the Palestinian people. Those were the first two months of the second intifada, in which the casualties mounted precipitously and many were eager to see wisdom prevail over the bloodshed and suffering of an entire people.

Unfortunately, however, a year later we continue with dismay, distress and helplessness to see the deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian territories. There have been 14 months of tragic acts of violence, confrontation and outright warfare that have caused the deaths of more than 1,000 people and injured tens of thousands, including children, women and the elderly. Although the economic damage has been significant, the sorrow and mourning are truly immeasurable.

Since 28 September 2000, Israel has imposed its law implacably through lethal incursions into Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem, the destruction of property on an increasingly large scale, the creation of new and the expansion of established settlements on Palestinian land, military occupation and the implementation of a pitiless blockade, which paralyses economic activity, imposes severe difficulties on the Palestinian people and is destroying the little that remains of the fragile trust between the two parties.

These actions make the possibility of achieving fair and lasting peace in Palestine, and throughout the Middle East ever more remote. Israel continues to defy and ignore the many resolutions of this Assembly, the Security Council and the Commission on Human Rights concerning the question of Palestine. The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and international humanitarian law are being openly flouted. At a time when the international community has openly and promptly voiced its resolve to combat terrorism, we view those outrages with profound concern. Resolutions that were adopted more than 50 years ago have been and continue to be ignored. We might well ask ourselves why there is so much incompetence and inaction.

Today more than ever, the United Nations has the key responsibility to participate actively in the search for a solution to the question of Palestine. The General Assembly must help to revitalize the peace process in the light of the manifest inability of the Security Council to enforce its own resolutions in any circumstances. We all know when, how and why such double standards are applied. They must be abandoned, along with the anachronistic privilege of the veto exercised by the United States on the many occasions when it must protect its allies and accomplices, regardless of the flagrant violations that they may commit before all mankind, making impunity a fundamental feature of their activities.

My delegation is highly honoured to be a co-sponsor again this year of the four draft resolutions submitted under agenda item 41. As it has traditionally done, Cuba will vote in favour of the draft resolutions and hopes that they will enjoy the majority support of the delegations present here.

We have heard enough speeches full of promises that vanish into thin air. We have heard enough rhetorical insinuations that fail to be translated into deeds. We have seen enough immoral complicity and injustice. We must call forcefully on Israel to comply with all the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. To use a fashionable term, there is no need to draw a new road map to chart the way to peace. It has existed for some time now and we must do our utmost to use it, without dangerous deviations that harm the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Cuba once again condemns the acts of aggression and state terrorism directed by Israel against the Palestinian people and reaffirms its resolute solidarity with that people in its struggle to establish an independent and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to secure the return of all occupied Arab territories. We must act with resolve and fortitude. Let us strive for justice and peace. Let us spare present and future generations of Palestinian children the horrors of the recent past and of the present.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

United Nations A/56/PV.70

General Assembly

Official Records

Fifty-sixth session

70th plenary meeting
Friday, 30 November 2001, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Hussein (Ethiopia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 41 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/56/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/642)

Draft resolutions (A/56/L.19, A/56/L.20, A/56/L.21, A/56/L.22)

Mr. Shen Guofang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Middle East issue is a burning issue of very long standing and one about which the international community is extremely concerned.

Although the people of Palestine have achieved partial self-determination in Gaza and the West Bank, after experiencing many years of warfare, achieving a just and lasting solution to the Middle East issue still seems remote, since the peace talks between Palestine and Israel have taken so many twists and because existing agreements between the two sides remain to be fully implemented. This new round of violence in the conflict between Palestine and Israel, which began in September 2000, has continued for a long time, has led to many innocent civilian casualties and huge property losses on both sides, particularly on the Palestinian side. It has also led to increasing tension in the region, making the Middle East peace process even more difficult and complicated. Recent developments are having an increasingly negative impact on peace and stability in the world.

We have noted the positive efforts of the parties concerned since last September to de-escalate the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis and to resume the peace talks between the two sides. We express our appreciation for those efforts. Regrettably, however, the violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis has not stopped; it continues to escalate, and the situation in the Middle East, rather than improve, has further deteriorated. Security is far from being safeguarded by either side and both peoples continue to live in the shadow of violence and conflict.

It is therefore necessary for the international community and the parties concerned to draw profound lessons from the situation. It has been repeatedly demonstrated in the past and currently in the Middle East that conflict and confrontation will only serve to deepen mutual hatred and complicate issues, while dialogue and negotiation are the only way to peace.

The Security Council, which has a special responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, should play an important role in promoting a solution to the Middle East question. Its overriding priority now is to take resolute action to end the violence and ease tensions as soon as possible and to fulfil the promise to protect civilians in armed conflict.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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The issue of the Middle East has a close bearing on international peace and security as a whole. An early end to the Palestine-Israeli conflict and the realization of peace in the Middle East are therefore in the fundamental interests of all. We strongly appeal to the two sides to earnestly implement their existing agreements, respond actively to the mediation efforts by the international community and return to the negotiation table at an early date. We also hope that those parties that have an influence on the two sides will play a positive role in promoting an end to the conflict as well as the early resumption of the peace talks.

At the core of the Middle East issue lies the question of Palestine. Without the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinians, including their right to independent statehood, it will be impossible to arrive at a fair, just and lasting solution to the issue of the Middle East. We have always maintained that relevant United Nations resolutions on this issue and the principle of land for peace are the basis for Middle East peace talks, and that the faithful implementation of existing agreements and understandings between the two sides constitutes a precondition for their mutual trust.

The Chinese Government and people have all along supported the just cause of the Palestinian people in restoring their legitimate national rights. We welcome all efforts by the international community to restore regional stability and will work, as always, with the rest of the international community to make a positive contribution to the realization of a comprehensive and just solution to the issue of the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Mr. Thayeb (Indonesia): The coincidence of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which was held yesterday, and the consideration by the General Assembly of the question of Palestine is a solemn reminder to Member States of the United Nations that, more than half a century since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), the Palestinian people have yet to exercise their right to self-determination and independence. Over the years, scores of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions have been adopted, but they remain unimplemented.

The great hopes and optimism generated by the Madrid Peace Conference a decade ago, and by numerous subsequent peace agreements and accords, have all but dissipated, and the rhetoric on paper can hardly be said to have made any tangible improvement in the lives of the people in the occupied territories. The Palestinian people remain dispossessed of their lands and continue to be deprived of their right to return to their homeland. The economic gains made during the heady days of the peace process have vanished, with the nascent economy being placed in a very precarious situation by the occupying Power.

Today the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is tragically spiralling rapidly out of control, resulting in the breakdown of the peace talks, escalating violence on the ground and the subjection of the Palestinians to illegal occupation. As the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has chronicled, during the course of the past year alone there have been scores of casualties, inflicted mainly on the civilian population. Of great concern is the use of deadly military force to suppress the outbreak of Palestinian protests against occupation. Also alarming is the resort to selective assassination of Palestinian leaders, which in the process has claimed even more lives of innocent bystanders, including children.

On the other hand, the occupying Power's illegal settlement activities continue unabated, coupled with its military incursions into territory already under Palestinian control. How can such a state of affairs be allowed to exist without grave ramifications for the region in particular, as well as for the peace and security of the world at large?

Since the unravelling of the peace process and the recent crisis in the region, the international community has voiced its deep dismay at the atrocities perpetuated against an entire nation and its people. It was against that backdrop that the Security Council met several times over the past year to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Regrettably, the Council was not able to take any tangible action, such as sending international observers to the occupied territories to protect Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation and to maintain a measure of peace and security.

It is also pertinent to mention the convening of the fifth special session of the Commission on Human Rights, in October 2000, at the behest of the overwhelming majority of member countries, to

address the serious deterioration of the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. That resulted in the adoption of several strong measures by the Commission, incorporated in its resolution S-5/1. It is indeed untenable that demands set forth in that resolution are being ignored while the occupying Power flagrantly violates the Fourth Geneva Convention. It is in that context that my delegation supports the endeavours to reconvene, at Geneva on 5 December, the Conference of High Contracting Parties in order to ensure respect for the provisions of the Convention and to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people.

There can be no alternative but for the parties to move forward to restore calm in the occupied territories, thereby enabling an environment conducive to the resumption of peace negotiations. That should be a priority for the international community. As unequivocal condemnation was voiced at the violence and terror inflicted on innocent civilians in the aftermath of the horrific terrorist attacks on 11 September, so too should we be mindful of the onslaught of violence and terror against the people in the occupied territories, coupled with the foreign occupation of the lands.

Violence begets violence and serves no purpose. It certainly does not provide for any degree of security. Security can prevail only if there is stable peace and if a people's yearning for freedom and independence is realized. What is at stake here is the urgency of attaining a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, and especially enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights in accordance with all relevant United Nations resolutions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international law.

It has been our steadfast position that for peace to endure, it must be achieved within the framework of international legality and on the basis of the following principles: the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from other occupied territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination.

In an environment of deepening crisis and a relapsed peace process, the Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba understandings were small but important steps to bridge the differences between the parties. Likewise, the Mitchell report offered some practical recommendations for a return to the peace negotiations. The Palestinian leaders demonstrated great sagacity and commitment to the peace process by accepting those recommendations as a stepping-stone to move forward.

It is self-evident that international efforts are central to ending this conflict, including the assistance of the United Nations and the co-sponsors of the peace process. We have also taken note of the statement made by the United States "to work towards the day when two States — Israel and Palestine — live peacefully together". Also significant is its announcement regarding contributing actively to a third-party monitoring and verification mechanism for a ceasefire acceptable to both sides and to the implementation of the Mitchell and Tenet plans, as well as to work with the international community to help rebuild the Palestinian economy.

Let us in the international community therefore seize this opportunity and redouble our concerted efforts to bring finality to the issue of Palestine and thus make the vision of peace, security and sustainable development a reality for all the Palestinian people.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka): Sri Lanka has continuously and consistently extended its firm and unqualified support to the people of Palestine.

Yesterday, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestine People, the President of Sri Lanka, Ms. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, reaffirmed such support in her message, in these words:

> "I wish to reiterate unequivocally Sri Lanka's firm and unwavering support for the people of Palestine in their continuing struggle under President Yasser Arafat's leadership to achieve their inalienable rights, legitimate aspirations and yearning for statehood.
>
> "Consistent with this policy, Sri Lanka has accorded formal recognition to a State of Palestine. It is deeply gratifying to note that there is growing international recognition of the urgent imperative to end occupation and establish a

Palestinian State as a just and durable basis for peace in the region."

It has been one of the principal responsibilities of the United Nations to maintain international awareness on the subject of the people of Palestine. It is a responsibility that the General Assembly, in particular, has discharged conscientiously through its annual consideration of the reports of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which address the depressing and troubling circumstances of the Palestinians of the occupied territories.

To the Chairman of the Committee, the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Papa Louis Fall, and to the Committee as a whole, much appreciation is due and should be conveyed, and I do so on behalf of the delegation of Sri Lanka.

To those of us who in earlier years expressed support for a State of Palestine, the now evolving general, explicit, international recognition of the legitimacy of, and necessity for, a State of Palestine is a most impressive and a most significant development.

The tragedy is that, to reach this stage, there has had to be so much pain, suffering, death and destruction, to which there still seems to be no end. Justice and peace still remain elusive. There was a time last year when there were glimmers of hope that developments in the peace process might possibly, in the not too distant future, lead to tangible improvements in the unfortunate circumstances in which the Palestinians of the occupied territories live out their lives. There were, however, the tragic occurrences of the closing days of September 2000 in East Jerusalem and the ensuing, engulfing violence that still continues.

It is unquestionable that there is a yearning for peace. Yet for peace to be achieved, there has to be a return to the peace process. Until such time as the peace process is satisfactorily concluded, contemporary human rights standards and obligations and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention must surely be fully recognized and fully honoured.

The report before us in the General Assembly today — the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People — tells of a severity of control, unknown before, that has settled on the occupied territories. The cycle of violence and counter-violence, violence and counter-violence, continues. There are hostile confrontations almost daily between Israeli forces and the Palestinians. The Israeli authorities have enforced their systems of civilian and military regulation with extraordinary intensity.

The heightened tension and violence since September 2000 have caused death and injury to a great number of Palestinians and Israelis, with Palestinians suffering by far the greater casualties.

There are other grave aspects to the occupation: the complex system of controls imposed on the movement of persons, vehicles and goods into and out of, between and within the occupied Palestinian territories; checkpoints, curfews and closures, resulting in what has often been referred to as a state of siege; settlements; the destruction of Palestinian homes and lands; and the disproportionate and excessive use of military force.

The overall consequences of such a manner of occupation have had catastrophic effects on the occupied territories as a whole: disruption of trade and employment and the ensuing general poverty; disruption in the provision of health services; disruption in schools and in the lives of the children; disruption in the provision of public services; disruption in education, and distraught and depressed parents; inadequacy of public revenues; and an all-pervasive cloud of frustration, desperation and hopelessness that appears to have enveloped all the occupied territories.

The conditions of the Palestinians in refugee camps are particularly distressing. They have no means of subsistence outside the refugee camps. When access to and exit from a refugee camp are closed and the Palestinians in a refugee camp are unable to obtain employment outside the camp, they, their families and their children are without any means of subsistence.

A sense of overwhelming despair appears to have enveloped the occupied territories, the countries of the region and the international community as a whole. It is to the Mitchell report and the steps being taken pursuant thereto that all now seem to turn in great expectation. One can only hope that there will soon be a return to the processes of dialogue and peace, leading to the day when all States in the region will live together peacefully in security and friendship, within internationally recognized borders.

The direct and indirect consequences of a general occupation of peoples and territories for such a long period of time are traumatic in the most profound ways — reaching across the entire spectrum of human relationships and affecting so unhappily the occupied, as well as the occupier.

Mr. Jerandi (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly is once again considering the question of Palestine, as it has done in past years. Our meeting today is taking place against the background of a deterioration of the situation in the Middle East on the whole and a standstill in the peace process. It is a source of deep concern that the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, which has been critical since the Al-Aqsa intifada in September, should enter into its second year without any tangible easing of tensions, despite the many international efforts that have been made to restore security and to give the peace process another chance.

The situation has further deteriorated, owing to the dangerous escalation of practices by the Israeli authorities in the occupied territories that violate relevant United Nations resolutions and international agreements signed by the Israeli and Palestinian sides. Israel has forged ahead with a policy of aggression against a defenceless Palestinian people, and has used excessive, disproportionate military force to attack Palestinian civilians and elected officials through its so-called targeted assassinations. This is actually a policy aimed at the physical liquidation of people, which runs contrary to international and humanitarian laws, and also to logic. Israel has also launched raids on areas that fall under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority and has reoccupied them. Furthermore, it has gone ahead with building new settlements, subverting Palestinian authorities, uprooting trees and demolishing Palestinian houses with a view to gaining time and consolidating a fait accompli. These practices, which are continued by Israel within the framework of a consistent and elaborate policy, run entirely contrary to international law, particularly humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949.

Israel is defying repeated appeals made by various international organizations, foremost among which has been the United Nations, calling for respect for international legitimacy and United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

This bloody confrontation has had a negative impact on the humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. The repeated closures of towns and villages and the economic blockade practiced by Israel have caused heavy losses for the Palestinian economy and have led to an alarming rise in the levels of unemployment, poverty, despair and suffering, resulting in a humanitarian tragedy for Palestinians in the occupied territories, whose lives, safety and security are targeted. This can only serve to exacerbate the tension and instability.

Tunisia, which has been following with great concern the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, would like to reiterate its condemnation of the constant attacks carried out by the Israeli Army against innocent civilians and their property and their holy sites. We also condemn the repeated assassinations that are being carried out by Israelis.

Tunisia also reaffirms its full solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support for their just cause, on all levels, and their legitimate struggle to regain all their inalienable rights, including the right to establish an independent State on their land, with the holy city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

We firmly believe that this critical situation, more than ever before, requires the United Nations and the Security Council, in particular, to shoulder their responsibilities in dealing with the deteriorating situation by providing urgently the necessary protection to Palestinian civilians and by implementing the recommendations contained in the Mitchell and Tenet reports so as to get Israel to renounce its practices.

Tunisia, which has always seen peaceful and political settlement as a strategic option, once again urges the international community and the sponsors of the peace process to exert further efforts to bring Israel to recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, to participate in a serious and responsible manner in the peace process and to respect international law and United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the principle of "land for peace."

The establishment of a just and lasting peace in the region requires, in accordance with the relevant resolutions and decisions, the full and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territory.

Tunisia notes with satisfaction the position recently put forward by the United States President George Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell, which supports the establishment of a Palestinian State in line with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. We hope that these positions will be translated into practical and concrete initiatives on the basis of a well-defined, agreed-upon agenda to pave the way for putting an end to violence and calming the situation and for pursuing the path of peace towards the provision of a just solution.

In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation and to salutations to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the actions it has carried out to ensure the implementation of the rights of the Palestinians and make them a reality. This work must continue until we reach a final solution to the question of Palestine by establishing an independent Palestinian State, with the holy city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Mannan (Bangladesh): Today, the United Nations is observing the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people. It is befitting that the General Assembly has commenced the debate on the question of Palestine under agenda item 41 to coincide with the event. With your permission, Mr. President, we will combine our intervention on this agenda item with agenda item 42 on the Situation in the Middle East.

It has already been three and a half decades since the Palestinians fell under illegal occupation by Israel. Yet their fundamental rights to self-determination and to a sovereign State have remained unrealized. Millions of Palestinians still live in refugee camps, deprived of their natural right to return to their ancestral home. The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People eloquently documents the continued violation of the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people in the occupied territory. We owe our appreciation to Ambassador Papa Louis Fall and members of his Committee for presenting us the report in document A/56/35.

The 1991 Madrid Peace Conference and successive agreements, from Oslo to Sharm el-Sheikh, generated euphoria, hope and optimism in the region, and peace seemed near and real. Regrettably, the hope soon withered away and was overtaken by the hostility and confrontation that had engulfed the region prior to the beginning of the peace process. The situation has once again become volatile. The Palestinian intifada that followed the highly provocative visit of then-opposition leader Ariel Sharon to Al-Haram Al-Sharif resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Palestinian civilians. Tens of thousands were wounded and permanently disabled, a large number of them women and children. Now, over a year later, not a single day passes without the media bringing us news of bloody events in the occupied territory.

My delegation is appalled by the recent aggressive reoccupation of Palestinian cities and villages. These actions have exacerbated the already volatile situation in the Middle East. The international community has raised its voice in rejection of this attitude and has demanded that Israel withdraw its troops from Palestinian self-rule areas without delay in order to facilitate the return of a climate of trust for making peace. We therefore reiterate our demand for a full and immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Palestinian self-rule areas and that they return to positions held prior to September 2000.

Israel has continued to pursue a policy of collective punishment in the form of closures, blockades and restrictions of movement imposed on the people of the occupied territories. Under the pretext of security, these acts are being deliberately perpetrated by Israel with the purpose of demoralizing the Palestinian people. Restrictions on the movement of people and goods within the Palestinian and Arab occupied territories and other areas have had a devastating effect on the already fragile Palestinian economy. This is unacceptable, and we reiterate our condemnation of this policy.

The Israeli policy of confiscation of land with a view to expanding the illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian land has been the major source of threat to the peace process. The international community has urged Israel to refrain from such acts, since their continuation would create further imbalances in the population structure of the cities. It is also a clear violation of the relevant resolution adopted by the Security Council.

In the course of the past year, Israel has resorted to a policy of targeted assassination of Palestinian political activists and leaders. At least 50 Palestinians have been killed in these targeted attacks by Israeli security. These extrajudicial killings by the Israeli authorities are a clear violation of international law and civility. We add our voice to the international community's unequivocal condemnation of these criminal acts and urge Israel to cease forthwith.

The present situation in the Middle East makes it incumbent upon the international community to put the peace process back on track. In this connection, Bangladesh fully endorses the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee and the Tenet plan as confidence-building measures to restore the dialogue. We commend the Palestinian leadership for accepting the report in its entirety. But we regret that Israel, on the other hand, continues to impose conditions for the implementation of these recommendations. We urge the sponsors of the peace process to exert pressure on Israel to start implementing the recommendations in a comprehensive manner, without preconditions. In this regard, we are encouraged to note recent initiatives indicating a more active involvement of the international community in this issue.

The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan is not very different. The Israeli leadership has never pursued serious negotiations with Syria within the framework of the Arab-Israel peace process. Rather, it has made repeated attempts to alter the demographic and legal character of the area by establishing new settlements and imposing its laws on Syrian citizens in contravention of all relevant Security Council resolutions. Bangladesh condemns such attempts. We call upon Israel to see reason and to end occupation of the Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied parts of southern Lebanon in the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1981) and 252 (1968).

Bangladesh reiterates its total support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. We reaffirm that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility in the Middle East until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. We believe that the active involvement of the United Nations and the international community is essential in this endeavour. Bangladesh views with satisfaction the resumption of the active role of the United States of America. Palestinians are the victims of the worst tragedy of humankind, and we all have a moral responsibility to support their legitimate cause.

The President took the Chair.

We have every confidence that the ennobling spirit of the faiths that emanates from the Holy Land will ultimately prevail, and the time will indeed come when the Muslim, the Christian and the Jew shall live side by side in peace and harmony as all those faiths enjoin. Bangladesh can hope for nothing more.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): As we take up the question of Palestine, I am obliged to thank the Secretariat for the comprehensive and exhaustive report prepared for us in order to better guide us in our discussions on a subject whose importance and relevance today no longer need to be underscored. Yesterday morning we had a foretaste of this, with the celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

While on the subject of that commemoration, allow me to take this opportunity to address my warmest congratulations to my friend Ambassador Papa Louis Fall of Senegal on his well-deserved election as head of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and also to pay tribute to his predecessor, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka.

We must emphasize that the Committee does useful work, and we hope the day is not far off when its efforts will come to fruition, when a sovereign and independent Palestinian State on free Palestinian land will rise from the ruins of so much violence, frustration and despair.

It is worth recalling the elements that should serve as a basis for any just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question. On the one hand, there should be strict compliance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and, on the other hand, respect for the following fundamental principles: the withdrawal of Israel to the former status quo — that is, to the 1967 borders; the guarantee for all States of the region to live in peace, within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; the recognition and the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily their right to self-determination; and international reassurance for the State of Israel.

It is gratifying to note that the international community has made praiseworthy efforts to help realize those principles through, for example, special sessions of the General Assembly, the meetings of the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention and meetings of organizations such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States.

But have the results met our hopes and expectations? At the moment, that seems doubtful: although we are optimistic about an ultimate settlement of the dispute, the serious exacerbation of the conflict is by no means encouraging. The glimmers of hope sparked by the peace process in 1993 and by the ensuing decisive action have quickly been extinguished. In their place we see bloody, deadly clashes between Israelis and Palestinians that day after day claim many victims, a majority of them women and children. The many acts of provocation and manifestations of despair such as suicide attacks reflect the extent to which the whole peace process has deteriorated. In the face of this predicament, the United Nations unquestionably stands at a crossroads.

General Assembly resolution 52/52, based on the principle of land for peace and one of the cornerstones of a settlement of the Palestinian question, remains a dead letter, as do other key resolutions such as Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). But one thing is certain: the question of Palestine will not be resolved by force of arms, but only through negotiations, through dialogue. In that connection, the Oslo and Wye River agreements between the Israeli Government and the Palestine Liberation Organization must not be set on a back burner; they must be fully reinvigorated in the framework of a renewed peace process.

The United Nations is certainly central to that process, and must therefore shoulder its responsibility. For that matter, all those of goodwill must play their part in the quest for peace. History abounds with examples of thoughtful, unified mobilization by the international community that has been decisive in averting the gravest of dangers. Three examples of the power of solidarity and united action were the victories against colonialism, Nazism and apartheid. The Palestinian question ought to benefit from the same heightened awareness and the same energy.

Burkina Faso is convinced that the new prospects opened up by the Mitchell report and by recent United States promises and initiatives since the outbreak of violence in the occupied territories, along with the consensus that has emerged between the two parties, could raise new hope for a settlement of the question of Palestine, but only if the main actors display goodwill, mutual understanding and tolerance.

Mr. Mubarez (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Once again, the General Assembly is considering the question of Palestine, which has remained unresolved for the past 50 years. Despite the numerous resolutions adopted by the United Nations and many attempts to forge a solution, such a solution continues to elude us, and the Palestinian people continue to wait resolutely and patiently. This problem was born simultaneously with the United Nations, and has become a touchstone of the effectiveness and credibility of the Organization and of the entire international community. Unlike on other issues discussed by the General Assembly, there is no need to go into all the causes and all the details.

The media daily report the number of fallen Palestinian martyrs. They report on the destruction that Israeli forces wreak on Palestinian property and homes. This painful cycle shows that, in spite of all that has been achieved in recent years, policies of force, occupation and expansion continue to plague the world. In recent years, there have been great changes in international relations; these have affected all the activities and priorities of the United Nations. The cold war is over, and we are no longer concerned about colonialism. But we face other problems, such as human rights, development, democracy, globalization and terrorism. And unfortunately, we continue also to face the Palestinian problem. This not only means that the Palestinians continue to suffer: the problem affects the entire world.

The Palestinian peace process is not complete because Israel is waging a disinformation campaign based on notions of security, self-defence and survival. But Israel's neighbours have now recognized its right to exist within its own boundaries; indeed, the Palestinian Authority has recognized Israel's existence side by side with the Palestinian State. So here, Israel has no further pretext.

We have witnessed Palestinians demonstrating, and we have seen children throwing stones. There have been changes in the world, but the Israelis are clinging

to the past. Israel is in fact motivated by frantic expansionism and domination. It wishes to expand into the Palestinian territories and other Arab lands. The Israeli Government accepted the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee, albeit with ill-grace and reservations. But Israel's expansionist policies continue in the occupied territories, as does its terrorist policy against innocent civilians, who are expelled from their lands and from their homes so that new settlements can be built. Tel Aviv announced that it would negotiate with the Palestinians, but at the same time we see systematic attempts to assassinate Palestinian leaders and leaders of civilian organizations.

It appears that the Israeli leadership is convinced that lies will become more acceptable with repetition. How else can we understand Israel's description of Palestinian demonstrations as acts of violence that must be stopped before negotiations can begin?

We have familiarized ourselves with the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The report shows that the Israeli allegations are false and makes clear the extent of the suffering of the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories must end.

However, there is a ray of hope: the positive stance taken recently by the United States. Indeed, President George Bush, speaking before the General Assembly, and his Secretary of State, Colin Powell, both have mentioned the need to bring to an end the occupation by Israel of Palestinian lands, in preparation for the establishment of a Palestinian state, side by side with Israel, with secure and internationally recognized borders and within the framework of international legitimacy.

Yemen welcomes this new American approach. We would like it to become a reality within a specified time frame, so that Israel cannot carry out any obstructionist manoeuvres. I hardly need recall that for years Israel has been refusing to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, so as to continue occupying Palestinian lands. This can be seen clearly in the note verbale from Israel addressed to the Secretary-General, as contained in document A/56/642, stating that:

> "Israel views the aforementioned General Assembly not only as being unbalanced, but also as an undue interference in matters which the parties have agreed to resolve within the context of direct bilateral negotiations." (*A/56/642, para. 4*)

Tel Aviv's position is well known. It wants to impose a fait accompli on the defenceless Palestinian people so as to alter the balance of power.

The Palestinian problem is linked to the interests of many parts of the region and elsewhere. This is what we have seen for 50 years now. The Israeli occupation must cease, as it contravenes internationally accepted principles. The United Nations must fulfil its responsibility towards the Palestinian people and work to promote a settlement that will enable the Palestinian people to be independent and to decide their own fate, just like other countries that have managed to free themselves of the yoke of foreign occupation.

In this context, Yemen would like to thank the Secretary-General for his efforts and to express our gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its work. We await the day when the United Nations and its organs will finally be able to come to the aid of the Palestinian people — not only the refugees, but the Palestinian people as a whole, so that they might finally realize their inalienable and legitimate rights.

Mr. Adekanye (Nigeria): It is a matter of grave concern to Nigeria that the question of Palestine remains unresolved and that the present Israeli-Palestinian crisis has entered its second year with an escalation of violence, creating mistrust and mutual recrimination as well as a vicious circle of violence and retaliation from which the peoples of the region have suffered enormously. The major casualty has been a lasting solution to the Middle East conflict, in which the international community set so great a store early this year. This development is captured in the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/56/642, whose paragraph 5 states that the present situation is "the worst crisis in the Middle East since the 1993 Oslo Agreement".

We commend the Secretary-General for his wide-ranging consultations with the Security Council and for his personal engagement in the search for a lasting solution. These efforts complement those of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority to de-escalate the current

situation and contribute towards a return to the negotiating table. It is reassuring that the Secretary-General has, in the process, also collaborated closely with other interested parties. We wish to encourage him in this endeavour.

Despite the gloom which pervades the Secretary-General's report, the Nigerian delegation believes that there is a glimmer of hope for peace and stability. First, we have, in the recommendations of the report of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee — otherwise known as the Mitchell report — released last April, an important path towards the resumption of negotiations between the parties to the conflict. We believe that their full implementation should generate confidence and trust. The fact that the report has been accepted by both parties and enjoys widespread support by the international community strengthens our confidence in that regard. We enjoin the parties concerned to exert every effort towards the implementation of the report and of the Tenet Plan.

Secondly, there is now widespread support for the creation of a Palestinian state, side by side with Israel. It remains the firm conviction of Nigeria that the legitimate desire of the Palestinians to national independence and statehood and the equally legitimate claim of Israel to recognition and security are not mutually exclusive. We welcome in this regard the statement made by President George Bush of the United States to the General Assembly on 10 November 2001, affirming United States support for a Palestinian state, to exist side by side with Israel. Let us build upon the momentum generated by this latest development to resolve, once and for all, the question of Palestine.

Meanwhile, the international community must address the humanitarian, social and economic consequences of the current situation in the region. As the Secretary-General has pointed out in his report, the situation has had a devastating impact, with an increased level of poverty, misery and suffering among the population. The need to reverse this situation cannot be overemphasized. We therefore call for the normalization of the situation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, and we urge the international community, and particularly the Bretton Woods institutions, to redouble their efforts and assistance in rebuilding the economy and infrastructures of the Palestinian Authority. Such support should be based on the needs of the Palestinian people, as determined by their representatives. We are confident that donor support for United Nations agencies through new and additional resources would also enable these agencies to pursue with vigour the programmes earmarked for the region.

Finally, I wish to reaffirm Nigeria's support for the restoration of peace and stability in the Middle East. It is our hope that the parties to the conflict will spare no effort in the pursuit of their desired goal.

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): Cyprus associates itself with the statement made by the Belgian presidency of the European Union.

The Government and the people of the Republic of Cyprus have repeatedly and consistently expressed sorrow and concern about the collapse of the peace process, the escalation of violence and the loss of so many lives as a result of events that have been continuing unabated for the past 14 months. The current situation aptly demonstrates once more the grave consequences of the long delay in bringing about a solution to the Palestinian problem. All interested parties, and the international community at large, should consider with the utmost seriousness and urgency the tragic reality of daily conflict.

We call once more for maximum restraint, since it has been demonstrated that any resort to violence not only fails to produce any tangible benefits but, on the contrary, aggravates an already tense situation. Time and again, Cyprus has stated that we share the view that the Palestinian issue constitutes the core of the Middle East conflict and that without its settlement the international community cannot attain its goal of finding a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East problem on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

We reiterate our long-held position that the acquisition of territory by war is inadmissible, and declare our support for the right of every State in the region, including Israel, to be able to live in security. We are particularly pained by the tragic loss of life of and injuries to innocent children. We believe that the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949 should be fully respected. In our view, solutions to international conflicts must safeguard the basic tenets of justice and international legality and maintain and restore the dignity of individuals. We believe that peace efforts and initiatives for the achievement of

peace and stability should be based on international law. It is important that solutions to problems should be perceived as fair, and accepted as such by the populations concerned.

Occupation, especially prolonged occupation, brings frustration, which can lead to acts of desperation. The Palestinian people must be able to look forward to the early prospect of an end to their plight. In this context, we reiterate our support for the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the creation of their own State. We express our opposition to the confiscation of Palestinian land, the restriction of movement of Palestinians, the deliberate destruction of their property and extrajudicial executions. We call for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from Area A. Bearing in mind our own experience of the negative effects of illegal settlements on the achievement of peace, we reiterate our opposition to such settlements.

We are encouraged by the recent statement made by President Bush during this year's general debate regarding the envisaged solution for the Palestinian issue, providing for two states — Israel and Palestine — living peacefully together, within secure and recognized borders, as called for by Security Council resolutions. We would also like to welcome the speech of the Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell, at the University of Louisville, and the consequent active involvement of the United States in the peace efforts. We believe that the international stature of the United States, and its influence with both sides, offer potential for moving beyond the current stalemate.

In general, we welcome every initiative capable of ushering in a new environment of stability and cooperation in this sensitive region. Cyprus has made its own contribution, including, inter alia, the hosting of meetings between representatives of the two sides in an effort to help restore dialogue and confidence. We reaffirm our readiness to assist again if requested to do so by both parties. We share the view that the inability of the international community to put an end to the unacceptable situation in the Middle East undermines the credibility of the system of collective security.

The Republic of Cyprus reiterates its support for the non-selective, comprehensive and immediate implementation of the provisions of the Mitchell report, which we hope will put an immediate end to the violence and create the necessary conditions for the resumption of the peace process and final status negotiations. In this respect, we fully subscribe to the position expressed by the European Union and other members of the international community concerning the need for the establishment of a monitoring mechanism to assist in the implementation of the report's recommendations.

We welcome the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1975) and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon last year. We reiterate our consistent position calling for the withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan.

In conclusion, we believe that the forces of moderation should be strengthened and those of the extremists should be isolated. Acts of terrorism should not be tolerated on the basis of any pretext. Outbursts of inflammatory rhetoric do a disservice to all sides, and the parties should instead work actively towards a win-win situation. Only thus will they manage to revive the hope of the vast majority of the peoples of our region for the establishment of a permanent peace and realize the vision for a new Middle East. For in that region — the cradle of three major religions and civilizations — coexistence is the only acceptable way. History has given us ample proof of that.

Mr. Sagach (Ukraine): For decades, the General Assembly has addressed the question of Palestine. This occasion reminds all of us of the historic responsibility of the United Nations with respect to the Palestinian issue — a responsibility that should be borne until the final and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the conflict in the Middle East, has been achieved.

Over recent years we have witnessed real progress and serious setbacks, the resumption of talks and outbreaks of violence, encouraging hope and deep despair in this volatile region. Regrettably, in this sequence of ups and downs in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the past year has been a particularly dark one. The Israeli and Palestinian parties seemed to be very close to reaching an agreement on very complicated and sensitive issues at Camp David not so long ago. Now they are further apart than they have ever been during the past decade.

Ukraine is concerned about the situation in the region, which remains critical. Since September 2000, it has been dramatically escalating and has turned into a large-scale confrontation that has claimed the lives of

more than 900 people, mostly Palestinians. It is particularly disturbing that the new outbreaks of violence in the Palestinian territory and within Israel almost every day are creating numerous additional victims and increasingly aggravating the situation in the entire region. We were shocked by the series of bloody acts of violence over the past months, in particular very recently, which almost shattered the slim hopes for the resumption of peace negotiations between the parties. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the remarkable progress achieved within the framework of the Madrid and Oslo peace processes has been brought practically to naught by 14 months of bloodshed.

The current situation requires that urgent steps be taken. Ukraine calls on the parties to the conflict to undertake resolute and immediate action to achieve a ceasefire and stop the bloodshed, to prevent the further escalation of violence and create the conditions necessary for a return to the negotiating table. At this crucial stage, both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders must display courage, flexibility and realism. The two parties must refrain from any unilateral actions that might lead to further complications or prejudge the outcome of the final status talks.

From our perspective, settlement activities by Israel in the Palestinian territories, as well as closures and economic sanctions against the Palestinians, are counterproductive. There can be no excuse for the excessive use of force against the Palestinian civilians and the reoccupation of Palestinian-controlled territories. It is our firm conviction that the practice of extrajudicial killings and devastating raids into Palestinian-controlled territory must cease.

Ukraine categorically rejects acts of terrorism as a means of reaching any political goal, regardless of who commits them and for what reason. We call on the Palestinian side to ensure that effective control be exercised over the radical elements in order to stop the abhorrent practices of suicidal bombings and terrorist attacks and to reduce incitements and provocations against the Israelis.

We are confident that implementation of the recommendations of the Mitchell report and the Tenet work plan, which were accepted by both parties and received the strong endorsement of the international community, constitute a solid basis for finding a way out of the ongoing crisis in the Middle East and for the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation process. In order to achieve a lasting solution, this process should be based on the relevant Security Council resolutions — in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — and the principle of land for peace, as well as other principles laid down at the Madrid Conference and in the Oslo Agreement.

The long and winding path of the Middle East peace process makes it increasingly obvious that the ultimate solution of the Palestinian issue lies in the establishment of a sovereign State of Palestine. We are convinced that the Palestinian people should be in a position to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and statehood and to live in peace and security. Their legitimate aspirations for justice, freedom, dignity and sovereignty are well understood and shared in Ukraine, which gained its independence just a decade ago.

At the same time, it is no less obvious that the final peace agreement between the Israeli and Palestinian parties should stipulate clear-cut guarantees for the State of Israel to live in security and peace within internationally recognized borders. We believe that the best way to ensure security guarantees for Israel would be through its development of mutually beneficial relations in all spheres and sound economic cooperation with other States in the region. In addition, it is only through negotiations that mutually acceptable and viable solutions to all of the complicated issues of permanent status can be reached, including those of the future status of the Holy City of Jerusalem and of the Palestinian refugees.

The present situation in the Middle East requires more decisive engagement of the international community and renewed diplomatic efforts by the sponsors of the peace process and all other international parties in order to help the two parties overcome their animosity and restore dialogue. Therefore, Ukraine welcomes the statements issued in the region last October by the representatives of the United States, the Russian Federation and the European Union and the United Nations Special Coordinator. We also welcome the position statements made on the issue very recently by United States President George Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell.

There is no doubt that the United Nations should continue to discharge its permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in

conformity with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Organization should remain a principal guarantor of international legitimacy with respect to the question of Palestine, as well as the headquarters of international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people. In this context, we consider the personal involvement of the United Nations Secretary-General in the Middle East settlement process a critically important factor. We support his mediation activities and encourage him to continue them.

Ukraine favours a more active role of the United Nations Security Council, which is entrusted with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, in searching for ways to resolve the current crisis and bring about a solution to the issue of Palestine. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, my country actively contributed to the adoption of Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) in October 2000, which provided an adequate and prompt response to the violence that had broken out in September 2000 in Jerusalem. It is regrettable, however, that since the adoption of that resolution, the Security Council has not found itself in a position to adopt unanimously new effective decisions on the matter in exercise of its Charter obligations. We hope that the Council will find it possible to reconsider such an approach shortly.

Ukraine stands ready to continue making its practical contribution to the international diplomatic efforts under way. In this context, I would like to mention that Ukraine has recently offered the Israeli and Palestinian parties its good offices, offering to provide on its territory a venue for their resumed negotiations at any appropriate time. We are glad that this initiative was well received by both parties.

In addition, I would like to recall another important event that took place recently in the relations between Ukraine and Palestine, namely the opening of the Diplomatic Mission of Palestine in Kyiv last October. In our view, not only has it broadened the channels of communication between the Ukrainian Government and the Palestinian Authority — thus fostering the development of our bilateral relations — but it may also contribute to the efforts to facilitate the normalization of the Middle East situation.

Finally, I would like to express our fervent hope that, through joint efforts on the part of the two parties, assisted by the whole international community, the question of Palestine will be resolved so that peace will return to the entire Middle East region and the peoples of Palestine and Israel will enjoy living side by side, in their own countries, secure and in peace, prosperity and dignity. Ukraine remains fully committed to helping them achieve this long-sought goal.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to convey to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the members of the Committee our sincere gratitude and appreciation for the great efforts they have exerted in supporting the legitimate and just Palestinian cause. I should like to take this opportunity to convey my deep appreciation for their most recent report, containing as it does important and valuable information that reveals some painful facts on the occupation practices and violations of Palestinian human rights being committed in the Palestinian territories.

The leadership, Government and people of the United Arab Emirates, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, reaffirm their continued support for the brotherly Palestinian people and their just struggle to fulfil their legitimate aspirations to self-determination, following the example of other peoples of the world.

Any student of the various stages of the history of the Palestinian question — specifically since the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II) of 1947, pursuant to which Palestine was divided into two states, one Palestinian, the other Israeli — must be disappointed by the continued obstructionist policy followed by successive Israeli Governments to prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. This student will, inevitably, also feel deep regret and bewilderment about the continued aggression, injustice and violations of Palestinian human rights by Israeli occupation forces. In the face of this situation, we wonder whether the persistence of these inhuman and illegal circumstances of the Palestinian people, half of whom which have lived for decades in miserable refugee camps in an era known for respecting human rights, globalization and democracy, is acceptable. Ours is an era that deals with all kinds of colonialism, racial discrimination and other scourges of the age of the jungle that has long since disappeared. Is it conceivable that the international community, represented by the United Nations and other

international bodies, can be content with issuing resolutions and statements of condemnation — ineffective measures for facing down the ongoing Israeli policies of intensified occupation and settlement expansion year after year — without proceeding to take the necessary and effective action to put an end to these dangerous Israeli policies?

We consider the Al-Quds uprising and violence — protests that the occupied Palestinian territories have witnessed for more than 13 months — to be natural national reactions and an expression of the Palestinian people's rejection of its daily suffering under terrorism, extremism and collective punishment in its territories, which have been used to drain the peace agreements concluded under previous Israeli Governments of their substance and to disavow Israel's legal and political obligations under the principle of land for peace. The Israeli Government pursues these practices to achieve its well-known strategic aims of expanding illegal Jewish settlements, displacing and annihilating more Palestinians and confiscating their lands, and to create new pretexts and rationales for "ensuring" Israel's security in order to justify the unprecedented Israeli colonial expansion at the expense of the legitimate national and human rights of the Palestinian people.

One reason for concern is the fact that, while the Palestinian side agreed at the beginning of the peace negotiations to make important historical and political concessions in order to prove its good intentions to achieve a real peace in the area that would safeguard its most basic legitimate aspirations to self-determination and the establishment of its independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, on half of the original area of its lands, the Israeli Government is engaged every day, in full view of the world, in new and riskier schemes. These schemes consist of murder, assaults, arrests, siege, closures, displacements, provocations to violence and the Zionist campaign against the Palestinian people and its National Authority. All these serve to cover up Israel's systematic and dangerous settlement expansion and confiscation of lands, water sources, energy and other natural resources; to usurp the citizenship and residence rights of the original Palestinian people in their cities and villages, in particular in Al-Quds Al-Sharif; and to expel more of them from their lands and replace them with Jewish immigrants, who come by the hundreds of thousands every year from all parts of the world.

The student of all these facts and tragic systematic events clearly realizes the real intentions of the Israeli Government, which is seeking to entrench its occupation of the Palestinian territories, in particular in the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and to alter their demographic, historical and religious character. That represents the worst direct violation of the principles of the Charter, the provisions of international law, relevant resolutions of the United Nations and human rights instruments, foremost among which is the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War.

The United Arab Emirates today renews its strong condemnation of all these shameful Israeli violations and expresses its continued concern over the laxity and general indifference of the Security Council, in particular its permanent members, as compared with the Council's increased attention to other security and peace issues on its agenda. We therefore call on the Council, its permanent members in particular, to abandon the policy of double standards; to work towards implementing urgent and necessary measures to protect the Palestinian people and its properties, institutions and national, economic and social interests; and to compel Israel to heed the calls for a full and unconditional withdrawal from the Palestinian and Arab lands it occupies by force.

We also warmly welcome the new position of the United States of America, as expressed recently by President George Bush and his Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell, in support of the establishment of a Palestinian State. We urge the international community, the United Nations and its specialized agencies in particular, to assume their full responsibilities towards the Palestinian question by redoubling their efforts and exerting every possible pressure on the Israeli Government to respect and implement the resolutions calling for an immediate end to all measures of war, excessive violence, settlement activity and violations of human rights directed against the Palestinians and their cities, and to implement all its other legal obligations under the series of peace agreements concluded with the Palestinian side in order to prove the good intentions that it announces every now and then in regard to peace and security in the area.

We affirm that a just, permanent and comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian question and the situation in the Middle East can be achieved only through a full and unconditional withdrawal of

Israel from all the Palestinian and Arab territories it has occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan Heights and the Lebanese area of Shebaa, and through the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital and the removal of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, within the framework of the resolutions on international legality and in accordance with the principle of land for peace and with all Palestinian-Israeli agreements that Israel violates in full view of the world. If this does not come about, the Middle East, which is strategically important in terms of international economic relations, will continue to live in a state of tension, violence and instability that will, in turn, negatively affect regional and international peace.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I should like to inform members that action on draft resolutions A/56/L.19 to A/56/L.22 will be taken on Monday, 3 December 2001, in the morning, as the second item.

Agenda item 42

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/56/480, A/56/642)

Draft resolutions (A/56/L.23, A/56/L.24)

The President: I now give the floor of the representative of Egypt to introduce draft resolutions A/56/L.23 and A/56/L.24.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to present the elements of the two draft resolutions under agenda item 42: A/56/L.23, entitled "Jerusalem" and A/56/L.24, entitled "The Syrian Golan".

Regarding the draft resolution entitled "Jerusalem", the three paragraphs of the preambular part recall previous resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on Jerusalem, all of which affirm that all the legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel with a view to changing or attempting to change the status of the city of Jerusalem are null and void and that they must be rescinded. It recalls Security Council resolution 478 (1980), which decides not to recognize the "Basic Law" declared by Israel, and it calls upon all countries with diplomatic missions in Jerusalem to withdraw them.

In operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution, the General Assembly determines that Israel's decision to impose its laws and administrative measures on Jerusalem is illegal and therefore null and void.

In operative paragraph 2, the General Assembly deplores the decision by some countries to transfer their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem and calls on them to abide by the provisions of relevant General Assembly resolutions, in accordance with the Charter.

The draft resolution entitled "The Syrian Golan" recalls in its preambular part Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of land by force, in accordance with international law and the Charter. Moreover, it reaffirms the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the occupied Syrian Golan. The draft resolution expresses deep concern at Israel's failure to withdraw from the Syrian Golan, contrary to the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and it stresses the illegality of the Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan. The last preambular paragraph expresses grave concern over the halt in the peace talks on the Syrian track and the hope that peace talks will soon resume from the point they had reached.

In operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution, the General Assembly states that Israel has failed to comply with Security Council resolution 497 (1981). The draft resolution also states that Israel's decision in 1981 to impose its laws on the occupied Syrian Golan is considered null and void, and it calls upon Israel to rescind its decision. The draft resolution also affirms the continued applicability of the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the Syrian territory occupied in 1967. It also stresses that the continued occupation of the Syrian Golan constitutes a stumbling block to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

In operative paragraph 5, the draft resolution calls on Israel to resume the talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and to respect its commitments and obligations made during previous talks. In operative

paragraph 7, the draft resolution calls on all parties concerned and the sponsors of the peace process to exert all the necessary efforts to ensure the resumption of the peace process and its success by implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In my statement to the General Assembly on 29 November, I presented the basic elements of Egypt's position on the question of Palestine. We hope that that position will yield results.

Today I wish to present the basic elements of Egypt's position on the situation in the Middle East in general. Egypt considers that the Palestinian question is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that its resolution is key to achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East.

At the same time, however, Egypt believes that a basic precondition to achieving comprehensive peace in the region is for the Israeli approach to peace to go beyond talking peace and then torpedoing it or postponing it or trying to impose principles other than those already agreed, foremost among which is the principle of land for peace.

In that context, we believe that any settlement between Israel and the Arab parties should be based on several equally important elements, namely, full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, agreement on mutual security arrangements, and the establishment of normal relations between the Arab parties concerned and Israel. Egypt would like to emphasize that until we arrive at a settlement that includes all these elements, Israel must, as the occupying Power, not take any measures on the ground that are contrary to its commitments under the provisions of international law and the resolutions of the United Nations. Moreover, Israel should not attempt to abort any real possibility for political dialogue.

The peace established between Egypt and Israel over 20 years ago was based on the full implementation of resolution 242 (1967) and consequently on the principle of land for peace. That settlement has therefore come to constitute a basic precedent for achieving peace between the Arab parties concerned and Israel. That means that Egypt bears special responsibility and is always obliged to refer to the foundations for peace that I mentioned, namely, full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and its removal of all settlements from those territories, reaching mutual and equal security arrangements with the consent of the parties concerned and, finally, establishing normal peaceful relations and good-neighbourliness.

Egypt believes that those elements, which are the basis of the formula known as the principle of land for peace, should apply to any settlement between Israel and the Arab parties concerned. In that connection, Egypt would like to reiterate that the implementation of Security Council 242 (1967) is an indivisible whole. We totally reject claims that this resolution should apply to one track of the peace process but not to another, or to some territories but not others. There is no legal foundation for such claims which, in fact, reflect a lack of clear understanding of the resolution. That resolution makes no differentiation, in letter or spirit, between territories occupied by Israel by force. All territories occupied by force in 1967 must be abandoned by Israel. This principle was consecrated in the Charter of the United Nations and has been applied by the Organization since its inception. It is a principle essential to the establishment of just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Along the same lines, I would like to reaffirm Egypt's position in support of Syria's right to regain full control over occupied Golan. That is the only way to establish peace between those two countries. I also wish to state that Egypt supports Lebanon's right to the Shab'a farms region. Similarly, I wish to say that failure to reach a settlement on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks will only serve to perpetuate existing tensions in the region, thereby delaying the establishment of peace in the Middle East.

Establishing a comprehensive peace in the Middle East is the real basis for comprehensive security for all parties in the region. In that regard, Egypt once again calls for the removal of all nuclear weapons from the Middle East. Moreover, within the framework of an initiative proposed by President Mubarak, Egypt has since 1990 called for the establishment of the Middle East as a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction. In that context, I wish to refer to Israel's continued refusal to enter into any agreements or measures that would contribute to confidence-building with regard to inspection of its nuclear facilities. This is something that adds to political tension in the region, a place already considered a hotbed of tension. It is clear that the security that we seek for the Middle East

is the security of all the parties concerned, and not just that of one party or some parties. Comprehensive security is the true synonym for comprehensive peace.

We are still hopeful that efforts at achieving a genuine and comprehensive peace settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict will be crowned with success. However, that hope — which has been severely tried and shaken during the last 13 months — is based on Egypt's firm conviction that peace is the only option available to the Middle East region. I would like once more to stress that Israeli conduct should be in keeping with the objective we seek, namely peace. We hope that Israel will realize the need to alter its behaviour in the region so that the Arab parties may be convinced of its seriousness about peace; otherwise, the tensions prevailing in the Middle East will continue for a long time to come, with all the suffering that that entails for the peoples of the region.

In conclusion, I would like to state that Togo has become a sponsor of draft resolution A/56/L.23 on Jerusalem, and that Guinea and Togo have also decided to become sponsors of draft resolution A/56/L.24 on occupied Syrian Golan.

Ms. Iyer (India): We are gathered here once again to discuss the situation in the Middle East, a region of great importance and concern to the entire international community.

The relationship between India and the Arab world has been fashioned by history on the larger canvas of the meeting between the Indian and Arab civilizations. It covers almost every important aspect of human endeavour — cultural, social, religious and political. The Arab world played an important role in transmitting and interpreting Indian thought and culture to the Western world.

On our part, we were closely involved in the Arab world's interaction with the Orient. The impact of the Arabic and Islamic world on India itself has been profound and far-reaching, giving rise to a composite culture that is rich in its diversity and enduring in its essential unity. These geographic, economic and social factors have created a unique affinity between India and the Arab world. When we speak on the Middle East, therefore, we speak of a region we consider our extended neighbourhood and about countries with which our relations are particularly close and deep.

We had hoped that the withdrawal of Israel from southern Lebanon last year and the deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the vacated areas would be a good portent, leading to progress on other tracks, and that prospects for lasting peace and tranquillity in the region would finally be within reach. Unfortunately, the situation since then has belied the optimism of the international community. There have been occasional outbreaks of firing across the Blue Line, though we feel that the presence of UNIFIL has been helpful. As a measure of India's commitment to peace in the region, we have contributed a battalion to UNIFIL, and the present Force Commander is an Indian General.

We regret very much that since September last year, the Middle East peace process seems to have stalled. There is a stalemate in peace negotiations on all tracks. India believes that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can be established only on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. In India's view, the status of Jerusalem, as per the Madrid and Oslo process, is one of the final status issues, and it is yet to be resolved. India supports a resumption of negotiations on all tracks of the Middle East peace process to complete the circle of peace in West Asia.

Even before the developments of 11 September, the sense of frustration in the Arab world has never been so high. The second intifada is the manifestation of the mood of despair among the Palestinian people. These developments make it imperative to address the core problems of the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian issue. The requirement for peace and stability in the region has now become even more acute. The international community cannot fail in its obligations. At the same time, the parties concerned must reaffirm their commitment to resolve their differences peacefully through sustained negotiations. There is no military solution to this conflict; violence must be abjured. This is the only way to achieve lasting peace in the region.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): The Middle East has been through yet another year of violence and tragedy. The cost to both Palestinians and Israelis in terms of human suffering, bitterness, disillusionment and mistrust has been very, very high.

Violence, terrorism and military responses have once again proved ineffective as a means of resolving the Middle East conflict. The time has therefore come to resume the peace process in a spirit of confidence and compromise. The tragic and appalling events of 11 September have made progress in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict even more urgent.

Norway welcomes the commitment of the United States to intensifying its engagement in the Middle East peace process, as outlined by President George W. Bush before the General Assembly and by Secretary of State Colin Powell in his statement in Kentucky. We also commend the active diplomacy of the United Nations and others. The growing international consensus on how to approach the crisis is encouraging, since it is vital to find a solution to the conflict.

We need look no further for a way to end the violence and resume negotiations. The way out has been well described by the Mitchell Committee and in the Tenet understanding. Their recommendations must now be fully implemented; no further delays can be accepted. A failure to fully implement the Mitchell recommendations might have serious political and economic repercussions for the region. All efforts must be made to break the ongoing cycle of violence and create an atmosphere conducive to new progress in the peace process.

The Mitchell recommendations were devised as a package and must be regarded as such. To ensure success, any operational plan for implementation must address key security and political recommendations simultaneously.

Norway therefore urges Israel to refrain from further military incursions into areas exclusively under Palestinian administration, to end its policy of extrajudicial killings, to show restraint, to freeze all settlement activities, to end closures and to transfer the value added taxes owed to the Palestinian Authority.

In line with the international efforts, Norway urges the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority to do their utmost to end the attacks on Israel and Israelis, to bring to justice all known terrorists, to renew their commitment to the ceasefire announced on 26 September, to ensure full enforcement of Palestinian Authority orders regarding the ceasefire and to continue full security cooperation with Israel.

In our view, the implementation of the Mitchell recommendations and the Tenet understandings could be facilitated if the parties were provided with support in the form of a monitoring mechanism. Norway stands ready to participate in a possible future mission to monitor the implementation of the Mitchell plan, should the parties agree to it.

One of the main reasons why the attempts to resume final status negotiations have failed is the lack of a clear statement regarding the objectives of such negotiations. Norway calls on the parties to recognize the following objectives for the final status negotiations: for the Palestinians, an end to the occupation of their territories and the establishment of a viable and democratic State in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); for the Israelis, the right to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. Only when both parties accept these goals explicitly will a resumption of final status negotiations have a chance of succeeding.

The Palestinian economy is in a severe recession after more than a year of intifada and subsequent closures of the Palestinian territory. The effects have been devastating. The Palestinian Authority is effectively bankrupt. Public services are beginning to collapse. Unemployment is higher than ever. The private sector is in crisis. The consequences for innocent civilians are incalculable.

In these very difficult circumstances, Norway remains committed to its role as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for assistance to the Palestinians. We will work together with the international community and continue to raise funds for the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority. We are, of course, also committed to continuing our bilateral programme of economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

The destinies of the Israelis and the Palestinians are inseparable. Security for the Israelis depends on security for the Palestinians, and vice versa. Peace can be achieved only through mutual compromise. The parties must recognize that the path to peace will be hard and painful, but at the end of the tunnel, there will be an end to conflict.

The time has come for the Middle East leaders to embark once again on the road to peace. Final status negotiations must be resumed. As a friend of the Israeli

and Palestinian peoples, Norway reaffirms its readiness to assist the Israelis and the Palestinians in reaching a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict.

Mr. Ling (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): In our view, the Middle East peace process is now in the midst of one of the most difficult periods in its history of more than half a century. We are still feeling the consequences of the tragic events of September 2000 in East Jerusalem, which gave rise to a new destructive flood of bloodletting and suffering and cast doubt upon the basis of the vitally important compromises that were attained in Madrid and Oslo and subsequently reinforced in Washington with the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum.

The Republic of Belarus views with deep concern the unceasing acts of violence in the region as a result of which people continue to die. We are deeply concerned about the irreversible damage that has recently been done to the prospects of achieving progress towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Against the background of the drawn-out escalation of the crisis, Belarus once again affirms its position of principle on the ruinous impact of any form of armed violence and terrorist activities in the region on progress towards a final settlement to the conflict.

We call on all sides, above all, to realize that every new shooting, missile strike, extrajudicial killing or explosion in the Middle East is a blow to the peaceful future of succeeding generations living in the region and to their right to live and work in their homeland, which is the cradle of three world religions.

The approach that Belarus takes to promoting peaceful coexistence between Arabs and Israelis in the long term is distinct and consistent. A just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is possible only if Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) are implemented and the basic principle of "land for peace" in the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese negotiations are put into practice.

In this context, what will undoubtedly be decisive is the level of political will on the part of the various parties to strictly abide by the obligations they have assumed, in particular, in the framework of Madrid peace conference and several ensuing implementation agreements. The cornerstone of the Middle East peace process remains the realization of the Palestinian people of their historical right to self-determination and the creation of an independent Palestinian State. Reaching such a goal will not be possible without wide international solidarity with the Palestinian people and the mobilization of massive political support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians.

Given the sharp deterioration of the social and economic situation of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and the increase in the number of Palestinian refugees, what is of particular significance is the combined efforts of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the donor countries and international organizations to provide the Palestinian people with economic, technical and humanitarian assistance. Stepping up the practical activities to this end is badly needed.

The present stage of development of the situation in the Middle East could be decisive for the future course of the peace process. The quickest way out from this impasse, which is bringing about new and entirely innocent victims, lies in reaching new agreements for the long term.

In this connection, we therefore count on decisive steps being taken on the part of the co-sponsors of the peace process aimed at renewing the Arab-Israeli dialogue on the basis the principle of strengthening trust, security and cooperation. The most recent statements by the President of the United States of America, George Bush, the Secretary of State Colin Powell, high-level officials of Russia and the member States of the European Union give cause for certain optimism in this connection. It is extremely important to maintain the momentum of the efforts in this direction, the initiatives contained in the recommendations by the fact-finding committee headed by George Mitchell and the subsequent agreements that have been reached through the good offices of George Tenet.

Belarus would like once again to underscore its adherence to the enduring responsibility of the United Nations and, above all, the Security Council for the peaceful settlement of the Middle East crisis in all its aspects. Our delegation is fully resolved to facilitate in the future the strengthening of the key role of the United Nations in the question of the Middle East.

In concluding, I would like to emphasize that the Republic of Belarus is firmly convinced that there is no alternative to renewing the peace process, which is the only way of ensuring respect for the inalienable rights

of all peoples of the Middle East to live in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders. We call on all sides to break the vicious circle of mutual violence and show a maximum of restraint so as to create an atmosphere that will promote the renewal of dialogue.

Mr. Al-Awdi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Middle East region is passing through a critical stage, as events are developing rapidly every day because of the continued Israeli occupation of Arab lands in Palestine and the Syrian Golan. This occupation is accompanied by abhorrent practices that make the Arab-Israeli conflict a constant reality that cannot be ignored, unlike other conflicts that have become part of history.

In discussing the two items concerning the question of Palestine and the Middle East, Kuwait evaluates the situation in the region in the light of developments relating to the Palestinian question, in particular, and to Arab-Israeli relations, in general. It has become clear to everybody that the continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories is the main source of tension in the region.

I do not exaggerate when I say that the international parties concerned with the establishment of peace in our region will now face new challenges embodied in the frustration, anger and resentment that is felt by Palestinians and people in the region as a result of the abhorrent Israeli practices against innocent Palestinians and their national institutions. Therefore, rebuilding confidence and reassuring the peoples of the region are urgently needed at this stage in order to put an end to the violence and pave the way for the implementation of agreements signed within the framework of the peace process and subsequent agreements, in particular, the Mitchell recommendations.

Kuwait believes that the question of Palestine is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that peace will not be just and lasting in the region unless we take into account all the demands of the Palestinian people, which we have long been reiterating since the inception of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

Firstly, there is an urgent need for the full withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territories and areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority in accordance with United Nations resolutions, particularly, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and for Israel to implement the bilateral accords signed with the Palestinian Authority, so as to ensure that the Palestinian people regain their legitimate political rights, including the right to establish an independent State on their territory, with the Holy City of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

I would like to stress the importance of supporting the demands of the Palestinian people, their right to Jerusalem, the refugees' right of return and the need to put an end to colonialist settlement policies and Judaization pursued by the Israeli Government.

Secondly, Israel must be pressured by all means possible to end its practices of repression and deliberate killing of innocent Palestinians, which lately have taken a new turn characterized by indifference and utter disregard for Arab sentiment. This deliberate policy is forging ahead, killing innocent citizens and children. The latest incident involved five students who were killed by explosives from an Israeli tank.

Israel's barbaric practices are a clear example of the violation of human rights and international humanitarian laws and instruments. They are also a clear violation of Security Council resolutions and statements pertaining to the protection of civilians in times of war and conflict, a subject on which the Security Council has been concentrating of late. In this context, I would like to call upon Security Council members to work for the establishment of a United Nations observer force that would guarantee the protection of Palestinian civilians, children in particular.

In support of the demands of the Palestinian people, Kuwait will continue to respond to humanitarian requirements through our on-going support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and, in accordance with decisions taken at Arab summits, by honouring our commitment to dispatching humanitarian assistance through the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society to the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. The Kuwaiti Red Crescent sent the last batch of assistance on 8 October.

Kuwait welcomes the recent new approach by the United States, its support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and its insistence on the need to halt violence and to implement the Mitchell recommendations. We call on all international parties, the European Union and the Russian Federation in

particular, to pursue current distinguished efforts to ensure progress, in line with the initiative of the United States Government — namely, to establish a time frame for reaching a definitive solution to this problem.

The elements required for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East will not be attained unless the settlement takes into account the need for full withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from all Arab occupied territories, including withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders.

The Israeli Government is presently exploiting the international situation negatively and has increased its policy of persecution of Syrian citizens who live in the Golan. Moreover, the same Government has tried to destroy property belonging to Syrian citizens in that area and has increased its settlement activities. These Israeli practices and activities must cease.

We call upon Israel to stop its constant threats against the security and sovereignty of sisterly Lebanon. Its withdrawal from South Lebanon, including the Shabaa Farms, must be completed so that the Lebanese Government will be able to devote its attention to development, reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. We call upon the international community to continue giving the necessary support to the Lebanese Government in this respect.

In conclusion, we hope that next year, when we take up the discussion on this agenda item again, we will have witnessed some positive developments, thus fulfilling our hopes and aspirations for peace and stability in the Middle East region. This will not be achieved until all members of the international community realize that the main reason for tension in the region has to be solved. We believe this to be the only way that we can fulfil our aspirations for peace in the region.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) *(spoke in Arabic)*: This year the General Assembly is discussing two items — the Middle East and the question of Palestine — amid some extremely important regional and international indicators. The terrorist attacks carried out against the United States have cast a shadow on our work throughout the past two months.

As regards the Middle East, in spite of all the efforts to bring the peace process back on track, we have noticed terrible procrastination on the part of the Israeli Government, which has declared policies that are contrary to peace and international legitimacy. Today's date coincides with the tenth anniversary of the convocation of the Madrid Peace Conference, through which Syria has tried, sincerely and in cooperation with the international community, to pave the way for a real, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The serious and purposeful negotiations carried out by Syria all these years have demonstrated two important facts to the international community: first, that Israel is not serious about achieving a just and comprehensive peace in accordance with United Nations resolutions; and secondly, that Syria has the right to full restoration of the Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967 without any bargaining.

However, we have always felt shocked at Israel's procrastination, arrogance, denial of rights and attempt to avoid the establishment of peace. In fact, Israel has carried out what was pledged by its then Prime Minister — namely, to make these negotiations revolve in a vicious cycle for 10 years. This has led to dangerous and tragic results.

Israel's occupation of the Golan was accompanied by its attempt to promulgate legislation, to take measures and to use all possible methods to annex lands, to do everything it could to build settlements and bring settlers from various parts of the world, thereby violating all international resolutions and pacts. Israel has destroyed and totally effaced urban centres. It has seized water sources and destroyed agriculture and animal wealth, thereby destroying the income of the Syrian Arab citizens in the Golan.

I would like to mention that the number of displaced persons, those who were expelled by Israel in 1967, has reached about half a million Syrians from the occupied Golan. They are still waiting to return to their lands and homes. In contrast, the number of Israeli settlers in the Golan is increasing. The Israeli occupation authorities have expanded the number of settlements, which now total 40, in flagrant violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

Peace cannot coexist with occupation. Peace cannot coexist with the muscle-flexing in which Israel engages every day by killing innocent Palestinians. Syria has always stressed the need for continued action towards the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of the implementation of Security

Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), on the basis of the principle of land for peace, and guaranteeing Israel's withdrawal from occupied Syrian and Palestinian territories to the lines of 4 June 1967. Israel should also completely withdraw from Lebanese territory and should release from its prisons all Arab detainees and hostages.

Recently, we have heard some statements that contained positive elements with respect to reactivating the peace process and drawing attention to the explosive situation in the Middle East. It is our hope that these will be complemented by concrete steps to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands and to force Israel to respect international legitimacy and implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. Our people, who for decades have been resisting Israeli occupation and repression, want a genuine commitment to implement United Nations resolutions on all tracks, to put an end to the occupation of all occupied Arab territories and to withdraw to the lines of 4 June 1967. We believe that if the co-sponsors of the peace process, the European Union and the United Nations do not strive seriously to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, this opportunity will again be lost, which would have dangerous consequences in this important and sensitive region.

His Excellency Mr. Bashar Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, has made it clear that Syria is consistently committed to peace as a strategic option with a view to the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the region. That is true in spite of extremely difficult developments in the peace process.

On the other hand, Israel gives daily proof that it is against a just and comprehensive peace: the wish for peace can never be consistent with the wish to kill. The assassinations, which are admitted, are no evidence of a true wish to attain genuine, stable peace and can never lead to stability in the region.

Israel accuses every Arab who resists its occupation, repression and massacres of terrorism. For many years, Syria has called on the international community to condemn all forms of terrorism, especially the State terrorism practiced by Israel. It is useful here to recall the well known fact that throughout its history our region never knew the phenomenon of terrorism until the establishment, on a religious basis, of Israel in 1948, which resulted from the activities of notorious terrorist organizations that sowed the seeds of fear and terror in Palestine and beyond it. It is unfortunate that Israel, which has excelled in the practice of terrorism in order to maintain its occupation of Arab territories and its expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and their lands, and which has carried out so many massacres, has not been held accountable for its crimes.

The Palestinian people thus realized that their only option for emerging from despair and frustration, in the face of international indifference, was to engage in repeated intifadas to resist occupation and to liberate its land and restore its dignity — as enjoyed by all the world's other peoples.

In the course of its 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Israel committed the most atrocious crimes, particularly shelling Beirut and blockading it for more than 80 days. It killed thousands of innocent Lebanese civilians; it destroyed the country's infrastructure; it perpetrated horrific massacres, for example at Sabra and Shatila. In the face of Israel's atrocities and its arrogant use of force, the only option open to the Lebanese people was perseverance and resistance to the occupation. The Lebanese resistance succeeded in confronting Israeli occupation and in expelling it from most Lebanese territory. No one in the world should forget that the battles of resistance were waged on occupied Lebanese lands and were waged against Israeli occupation forces — whereas Israeli occupation forces have killed thousands of Lebanese civilians and have more than once destroyed Lebanon's infrastructure.

In his recent statement to the General Assembly, Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, stressed that those who wish to target terrorism in our region should, first and foremost, target Israeli terrorism. Because what Israel is perpetrating is the worst form of terrorism.

Peace is the desire and the will to comply in full with decisions of international legitimacy. Peace is not just empty words; it is reality on the ground and practice of it. It is not misrepresentations and myths that seek to conceal massacres and atrocities. Continued Israeli occupation means that resistance to it is legitimate. Those who think they can put a stop to resistance and to the intifada are mistaken. They will continue as long as the occupation continues. The Israeli Government would be wrong to think it can

impose security before regional peace is achieved, because security is the result and the logical outcome of peace.

Mr. Al-Jomae (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): The item before the Assembly today is entitled "The situation in the Middle East". It has been on the agenda for 56 years, and the United Nations is 56 years old. In the historic Millennium Declaration, third-world and other countries affirmed their commitment to the Charter, to sovereign equality among States and to the right of peoples to self-determination.

Yesterday and earlier today, we discussed Palestine, and we said that the solution of the Middle East question depended on the solution of the Palestinian problem, and that the solution of the Palestinian problem involved the implementation of United Nations resolutions, the establishment of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, and the return of Palestinian refugees or the provision of compensation if they choose not to return.

The solution to the Palestinian problem should therefore be based on these three premises. That is why the Government of my country reiterates its appeal to the States involved in the peace process to put an end to the bloodshed and to oblige Israel to abide by the provisions of international law and by the resolutions of the Organization, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace.

All the States of the region except Israel have acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Israel refuses to do so or to submit its nuclear facilities to international verification, which poses a grave threat to peace and stability in the region.

Saudi Arabia is deeply concerned about this problem. We wish the Middle East to be free of all nuclear weapons and thus find Israel's refusal problematic. We also reject the use of any double standard, such as exempting Israel from the obligation to accede to the NPT.

Respect for international legality and for obligations undertaken are the twin pillars of security and stability. The tensions experienced by our region and the cycle of violence have no other cause than Israel's non-respect for international law and for the resolutions of the Organization.

The stability to which we aspire is dependent on Israel's immediate withdrawal from the Golan and from Shab'a farms in southern Lebanon. We believe, therefore, that the international community should play an active role in the region to ensure respect for international legality.

Postponement of the date of recess

The President: I should like to draw the attention of members to the date of recess of the current session. Members will recall that at its 3rd plenary meeting, on 19 September 2001, the General Assembly decided that the fifty-sixth session would recess on Tuesday, 11 December 2001.

However, I have been informed by the Chairmen of the Second and Fifth Committees that the Committees will not be able to conclude their work by 11 December 2001. Hence, the Assembly will not be able to conclude its work by that date. I should like, therefore, to propose to the Assembly that it postpone the date of recess of the current session to Friday, 21 December 2001.

If there is no objection, may I take it that the Assembly agrees to this proposal?

It was so decided.

Programme of work

The President: In the light of the decision just adopted to extend the date of recess of the current session, I should now like to make an announcement concerning the programme of work of the General Assembly.

I should like to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/INF/56/3/Add.2, which covers the period from 3 through 14 December 2001 and which is now being distributed to Member States in the Hall.

The lists of speakers for the items mentioned in document A/INF/56/3/Add.2 are open.

The General Assembly, in due course, will be kept informed of the dates for the consideration of other agenda items, as well as of any additional changes.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.

United Nations A/56/PV.71

General Assembly
Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

71st plenary meeting
Friday, 30 November 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 42 *(continued)*

The situation in the Middle East

Mr. Fedotov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): For more than half a century, the General Assembly has devoted continuing and focused attention to the question of the Middle East. Regrettably, however, we have to acknowledge that during this lengthy period, the Middle East has remained in a state of serious crisis. Just as a half century ago, its epicentre remains the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Almost every day the international community is confronted with images of terrorist acts, which are then followed by reprisals. The peace-loving population suffers and acts of destruction proliferate, further destabilizing the Palestinian territories and the region as a whole. Current realities are such that the peaceful dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis has been set back, and the peace process, which has been the subject of extremely intensive efforts since the Madrid Conference, has been brought to a standstill.

These developments are a source of serious concern for Russia. From the onset of the conflict, Russia, as a co-sponsor of the Middle East peace process, has been working actively to stabilize the situation and to breathe new life into the process of working towards a comprehensive regional settlement. That question has been at the centre of the continuing and focused attention of the President of Russia, Mr. Putin, and of its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ivanov, who maintains contacts with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, the Secretary-General, as well as his counterparts in the United States, the States of the European Union and the Arab countries. A special envoy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in the region on an ongoing basis, and, together with other international mediators from the United States, the European Union and the United Nations, is working intensively and tirelessly with the parties to the conflict.

Important impetus was given to this work by the meeting in New York this month of the Foreign Ministers of Russia and the United States with the European Union and the Secretary-General.

The problem of the Middle East settlement was one of the major issues of concern in the context of the November American-Russian summit. The Presidents of Russia and of the United States, at the conclusion of their talks, issued a joint statement on the Middle East setting forth some general approaches to a settlement of the numerous problems facing the region. Russia believes in this respect that the basic thrust of diplomatic efforts should be to enable the immediate launching of the process of implementing those agreements already reached between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Russia believes also that the settlement should be based on the recommendations of the Mitchell report, whose implementation would make it possible to put an end to the violent confrontation between the Israelis and the Palestinians, to stop the

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violence, to adopt confidence-building measures and to relaunch the peace process. The Government of the Palestinian National Authority should be decisive in preventing extremist acts, and the Government of Israel should complete its withdrawal of troops from Palestinian cities, remove the blockades, lift the financial embargo and carry out other steps to normalize the situation, including imposing a complete freeze on settlements.

We are convinced that by implementing these steps it will be possible for talks to begin again on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid principles for the settlement of the Middle East question and the formula of land for peace. A firm settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli question should include ending the occupation, creating a viable Palestinian State and providing genuine security for Israel and Palestine on an equal footing. A just solution to the problems of Jerusalem and the refugees should be sought within an international legal framework.

The events of 11 September this year have had a profound effect on the structure of international relations as a whole. As far as the situation in the Middle East is concerned, they have made more urgent the task of achieving immediately a comprehensive peace settlement. However, the attainment of that goal will not be possible without the development of a comprehensive approach to the resolution of various problems in the area, in particular ensuring a revival of the talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the peace process. Genuine peace in the Middle East will be impossible without a constructive dialogue between Israel and Syria, the result of which should be the return to Syria of the Golan Heights and the establishment of normal relations between the two States. For its part, Russia will continue to work actively to overcome the crisis and to reinvigorate the peace process in the Middle East.

Mr. Al-Sameen (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to tell you once again, Mr. President, how much my delegation appreciates your wisdom and skills in guiding our discussion during this fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, which we are sure will achieve the positive results to which we all aspire.

The situation in the Middle East is one of the major challenges that we are facing at the beginning of this new millennium. On the question of Palestine, the international community believes that the peace process that began in 1991 in Madrid is the most important and serious initiative designed to bring to an end a situation that has continued for decades and wasted an enormous amount of human energy. The Madrid outcome was itself the result of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions aimed at the achievement of peace based on the principle of land for peace. All these measures reflected the commitment of the parties involved, and they must not now call their own efforts into doubt.

My Government has long been keenly concerned about moving peace forward, convinced that peace alone can guarantee progress and prosperity for humankind. My country therefore gave its blessing to the Camp David agreements between the Egyptian Arab Republic and Israel in 1979. Indeed, we supported the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 for the same reason. We also supported the outcome of that Conference and the resultant agreements. We consider them to be a historic achievement, contributing to the prevention of bloodshed and opening the way to cooperation among the peoples of the region.

Furthermore, my country has been involved in ambitious efforts and actions to move the peace process forward and has been actively involved in multilateral negotiations. We organized a regional conference on water resources and exchanged representative offices with the Palestinian National Authority, and we have established trade ties with Israel. We were optimistic in the first half of the 1990s, when a period began that we believed would put an end to all forms of the conflict and would propel the pace of progress towards peace in a significant way. Agreements had been reached and others were on their way, and major progress was also made on the Syrian-Israeli track.

Yet the expectations were not met, because of Israel's unjustified attempt to backtrack. The agreements signed with the Palestinian side were quibbled over, and the result is the situation that we are facing now in the Middle East. It is clear that Mr. Ariel Sharon, the current Prime Minister of Israel, does not want peace to come about in the region. Israel's actions — the massacres and assassinations it has carried out, the destruction of the economic infrastructure in the occupied Palestinian areas, the expansion of the settlements, the occupation of Orient House and the expulsion of Palestinians from their

homes — make it very clear that Israel does not truly want peace.

We understand that the path to peace will not always be easy. There will be many obstacles along the way as the process unfolds, given the many complications and the divergence of views between the parties. The Arab-Israeli conflict has continued for over half a century and has involved a number of different struggles and entrenched many political, mental and psychological barriers. Israel has clearly brought the process to a standstill, which we do not understand and cannot accept. Resolution 181 (II), adopted by the General Assembly in 1947, was designed to put an end to the Palestinian British mandate in two phases, creating both a Jewish and a Palestinian Arab State. Other Security Council and General Assembly resolutions followed. Notwithstanding those resolutions, the Palestinian people continue to be deprived of the chance to exercise even their most basic human rights — as guaranteed by the United Nations Charter — including the right to self-determination and to the creation of an independent State on their own territory.

We believe that the United Nations has historical responsibilities with regard to ensuring a just and lasting peace in the Middle East in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Charter and relevant legally binding resolutions. These responsibilities include pursuing the peace process in accordance with international resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and on the basis of the principle of land for peace, and ending all measures taken by the Israeli Government to change the geographic and demographic character of Al-Quds. Security Council resolution 465 (1980) declares the Israeli settlements to be null and void and calls for dismantling them.

Finally, a just solution must be found to the problem of the Palestinian refugees, based on General Assembly 194 (III), adopted in 1948. We must also ensure respect for the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and support Syria's call for a resumption of negotiations from where they were left off, with the aim of ensuring the return to Syria of the occupied Syrian Golan and a return to 4 June 1967 borders. This, in turn, will require the return to Lebanon of the Shebaa farms.

We consider the declaration of United States President George W. Bush with regard to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, as well as what United States Secretary of State Colin Powell said concerning the establishment of a Palestinian State and putting an end to Israeli occupation and settlements, to be encouraging steps. We expect a response from Israel to these declarations that aim also at reactivating the peace process. The European Union has made similar statements and efforts designed to promote the peace process and stop the spiral of violence and bloodshed. A well-defined variety of instruments and tools must all be brought to bear, on the basis of a specific timetable.

We support all the efforts of the United Nations to fight acts of international terrorism, such as those that recently struck the United States. This must not be accomplished, however, at the expense of the suffering of the peoples of the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian people.

Mr. De Loecker (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia; the associated countries of Cyprus, Malta and Turkey; and Iceland, the European Free Trade Association country belonging to the European Economic Area, associate themselves with this statement.

The situation in the Middle East remains very grave and, as we are all aware, presents serious risks to regional stability. I do not want to recount here the tragic events continuing to unfold in the occupied Palestinian territories, as the EU has already spoken at length on that subject in the debate on the question of Palestine. At that time, we once again pointed out that negotiation is the only way to achieve a definitive settlement of the Palestinian question.

In the context of the peace process, a certain progress has been achieved that needs to be preserved and built upon. In particular, we have in mind the Madrid Conference principles, especially that of land for peace, and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the agreements signed by the parties and the progress made in previous negotiations.

The quest for peace is primarily a matter for the parties themselves to pursue through negotiations on all components of final status, including the prospect of a just and viable solution to the issues of Jerusalem and refugees, as well as economic support for the Palestinian population. In order to find a way out of the sad current situation, we once more call on the Israeli and Palestinian sides to ensure full, immediate and unqualified implementation, without conditions, of the recommendations contained in the Mitchell report and the Tenet plan. No one can win using this logic of confrontation and violence. The parties must return without delay to the path of dialogue and negotiation.

In Lebanon, a major development emerged last year with Israel's withdrawal from the south of the country. At that time, the EU noted with satisfaction the Israeli Government's decision, which was in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). The Union commended the successive steps that helped restore stability in the area, a necessary condition for reconstruction and development. The EU remains ready to contribute to the reconstruction effort in the area, as it has done constantly for Lebanon as a whole.

To realize these objectives, it is essential that the Lebanese Government, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1365 (2001), take further measures to re-establish its authority effectively throughout the south, particularly by deploying Lebanese armed forces. In addition, the parties must continue to honour their commitment to respect scrupulously the withdrawal line mapped out by the United Nations, and must show the utmost restraint and cooperate fully with the United Nations and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). In this connection, UNIFIL can count on the European Union's full support in carrying out its task of restoring international peace and security.

The progress made in Lebanon does not in itself, however, resolve the broader problem of the peace process in the region. The European Union would like to reiterate that the quest for a comprehensive, lasting peace in the region requires that due account be taken of the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks in the conflict, resolution of which has to be based on the Madrid Conference principles, particularly that of land for peace, and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We call on the parties to resume negotiations on that basis as soon as circumstances permit.

The European Union reaffirms its commitment to respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States in the region. It also reiterates that it regards the establishment of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Golan Heights as illegal and contrary to international law.

The Union is determined to work for the reactivation of the multilateral track of the peace process as soon as conditions are favourable. It attaches particular importance to the Regional Economic Development Working Group, for which it acts as coordinator. Regional cooperation will enable the economic, ecological and demographic challenges of the coming years best to be addressed. It was in that spirit that the Union adopted, at Santa Maria da Feira, its common strategy with regard to the Mediterranean region. This included, inter alia, a statement of its conviction that the successful conclusion of the Middle East peace process on all its tracks, and the resolution of other conflicts in the region, are important prerequisites for peace and stability in the Mediterranean region. Given its interests in the region and its close and long-standing relations with the region's constituent countries, the EU aspires to play its full part in bringing about stability and development in the Middle East. The cooperation already initiated within the framework of Barcelona process is a determining factor in laying the foundations for the post-peace era in the region.

The Euro-Mediterranean Conference recently held in Brussels on 5 and 6 November 2001 showed once again the commitment of all partners to the Barcelona process as the essential and favoured framework for dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and the countries on the southern and eastern sides of the Mediterranean. The Barcelona vision remains as topical as ever.

In conclusion, the European Union would like to reaffirm its strong commitment to a just, durable and comprehensive peace based on the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and the principles of the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference. The EU remains prepared to do its utmost to achieve a peaceful, prosperous future in the Middle East.

Mr. Ahmad (Pakistan): Yesterday, we commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with

the Palestinian people. It is only befitting that we started our debate to coincide with this occasion. It was a day of reflection and resolve — reflection, because it has been 54 years that the Palestinian people have remained deprived of their inalienable rights, to which they are entitled under the Charter of the United Nations and other international conventions; resolve, because the Palestinian people, in spite of the tremendous odds against them, continue to persist in their just and courageous struggle for self-determination. I reaffirm today before this Assembly the unswerving and unflinching support of the Government and people of Pakistan for the Palestinian cause.

I remember standing here at this very rostrum exactly one year ago, expressing my hopes and my fears on the situation in the Middle East. Unfortunately, it is what I feared, rather than what I hoped for, that has now come to pass. Instead of beginning a new century with the promise of peace in the Middle East, we have witnessed the alarming slide of the region into a vicious cycle of spiralling violence, which has claimed hundreds of innocent lives. Today, the glimmer of hope for some progress in the peace process that we saw last year, unfortunately, is beset by the haze and uncertainty of the current situation in Palestine.

We share the deep concern of the international community over Israel's policy of the use of excessive force, indiscriminate attacks against unarmed Palestinian civilians and targeted assassinations of Palestinian leaders and activists. Israeli incursions into territories controlled by the Palestinian National Authority, the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, the unwarranted seizure of Orient House and Palestinian offices in Jerusalem last August and the unabated violence committed by Israeli security forces in key Palestinian cities have gravely undermined the Oslo peace process.

The Israeli policy of economic blockade has debilitated the Palestinian economy. The situation has been further compounded by the large-scale destruction of Palestinian infrastructure and other repressive measures, leaving large numbers of Palestinians without jobs or even shelter.

It is the responsibility of the international community, and especially of the United Nations, to attain a fair, just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question in all its aspects. Regrettably, it is the international community's inability to tackle the problem at its roots, either in Palestine or elsewhere, that is the main reason for the perpetuation of such conflicts. The horrific results, which include the deaths of innocent people, including women and children, are clear for all to see. The remedy is also clear. The international community must remove the injustice that perpetuates the conflict and restore to the Palestinian people their inalienable right to self-determination. The United Nations must implement its own resolutions.

At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, a long time ago, President Woodrow Wilson of the United States of America said that

> "National aspirations must be respected; peoples may now be ... governed only by their consent. 'Self-determination' is not a mere phrase; it is an imperative principle of action."

This pronouncement still holds true today and patterns of repression cannot be justified simply because they are familiar. We cannot use the plea that there is no alternative. If we are earnest and sincere in our intentions, then peace, stability and the settlement of disputes are the real alternatives. The repression of an occupied people, just like terrorism, needs to be condemned and tackled in all its forms and manifestation. These fundamentals must always be stated and often repeated.

Offers of dialogue and peace should not be left to the generosity of the occupying Power. They must be made a matter of law and right. The international community must play its due role to ensure the just and durable settlement of long-standing disputes involving the destiny of a people. If the question of East Timor could be so successfully resolved, why can the international community not be adroit enough to take similar action in other parts of the world where peoples continue to be denied their inalienable right to self-determination, in violation of universally acknowledged principles and the decisions of the Security Council?

The situation in Palestine warrants urgent remedial actions necessitating immediate steps by the international community, the first of which must be to address the problem of the security of the Palestinian people. This is indispensable to halting the unending cycle of violence. Efforts must also be made to bring an end to coercive measures, which constitute serious breaches of the Oslo peace accords and run contrary to

the assurances given to the brokers of the Middle East peace in 1993 that the activities of the Palestinian institutions would not be hampered.

Peace cannot be achieved by binding a weaker party to agreements while allowing the stronger one a free hand. The deteriorating situation in Palestine demands active intervention by the international community to end the violence and oversee the implementation of commitments made and agreements signed. The international community, particularly the guarantors of the peace process, must also use their influence and good offices to ensure full Israeli compliance with the peace agreements and with its legal obligations and responsibilities as an occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949.

Pakistan has steadfastly and unequivocally supported the just struggle for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as it supports those of all other peoples who remain subjugated by similar alien occupation and foreign domination. We have consistently stated that Security Council resolutions must be implemented without discrimination between regions and peoples. Those States which are in violation of such resolutions and are using State terrorism to trample upon the inalienable right to self-determination of the people under their occupation must be held accountable.

There can be no lasting peace in the Middle East without the attainment of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. These include the return of all occupied territories to the control of the Palestinian Authority, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with holy Jerusalem as its capital, and the exercise of their full sovereignty over Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) continue to provide a viable and just framework for a durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. A settlement of the Middle East question must, by definition, also include the restoration of the Syrian Golan and full respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon. A durable peace in the Middle East is simply not possible in the absence of justice. We therefore agree with the Secretary-General that there can be no lasting security without lasting peace and lasting peace can be ensured only by adhering to the principles of justice and international law.

Pakistan unequivocally supports the international calls for restraining Israel from aggravating an already tense situation in the Middle East and urges the resumption of negotiations leading to a just, durable and comprehensive peace settlement consistent with United Nations resolutions and the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people. This is the key to a permanent peace in the Middle East.

Finally, let me state that the twenty-first century did not begin on 1 January this year. It began in 1989, when the Berlin Wall came down and the Iron Curtain fell, letting the people of Eastern Europe enjoy the right of freedom. Unfortunately, some of the chapters of the last century, written in the blood of innocent people, are yet to be closed. It is time now for the international community to uphold its moral and legal obligations under the Charter. Those who have the power and the responsibility to maintain international peace and enforce international law must now act to complete the unfinished agenda of the previous century. Let those who remain deprived of freedom and inalienable rights enjoy them. Let those who have long cherished the desire for freedom taste it. Let those who are still denied their right to self-determination, whether in Palestine or in Kashmir, be finally given the opportunity to exercise and realize it.

Mr. Lancry (Israel): One year ago, I addressed this Assembly and described how history was giving birth to a new epoch in the Middle East. Today, we are experiencing the labour pains of that new era.

We are in the throes of a revolution in the ways that the peoples, nations and religions of the Middle East relate to one another. And revolutions are painful, traumatic experiences. To reap the fruits of these new modes of interaction and the manifold possibilities of our brave new age, we must labour against the rejectionism that emerges from the depths of the violent extremist ideologies that have caused us all immeasurable suffering. Beyond the present grief and pain for which they are responsible, we retain our hope and our vision for a more peaceful and prosperous future.

Indeed, we cannot permit ourselves to forget the enormous progress we have made over the past generation in ending long-standing conflicts and opening the door to greater tolerance and coexistence in the Middle East. Israel has concluded peace treaties with two of our neighbours, Egypt and Jordan; we have

strengthened our relations with other States in the region; and the Oslo peace process initiated an historic process of reconciliation with our Palestinian neighbours.

And though the past year has been a tremendous and heart-wrenching setback, the path forward remains open to us and to all the peoples of the region. Our history has repeatedly shown us the futility of war and conflict. The only way to achieve a future of peace, stability and opportunity is through dialogue conducted in an atmosphere free from terrorism, hatred, demonization and incitement.

While we have made progress in certain areas and with certain countries, others remain fixated on fighting wars that have long since ended and on stoking prejudices that have no place in the civilized world. It is most unfortunate that, more than 50 years after Israel's establishment and despite the great strides we have made towards peace and integration with our neighbours in the region, certain regimes continue to cultivate those dark forces of rejection so as to perpetuate a useless and futile conflict with us.

Along our northern border, the Government of Lebanon clings to its position that continuing aggression against Israel and its failure to comply with the will of the international community are somehow legitimate. In May 2000, Israel unilaterally withdrew its forces from southern Lebanon, in full compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Israel's fulfilment of its responsibilities under resolution 425 (1978) was confirmed by the Secretary-General and subsequently endorsed by the Security Council and has been repeatedly referred to, for example, in Security Council resolutions 1310 (2000) and 1337 (2001). The responsibility now falls to the Government of Lebanon to fulfil its remaining responsibilities under resolution 425 (1978), namely, the deployment of its armed forces up to the Blue Line so as to reinstate its effective authority in the southern region and to restore peace and security in the area.

Although Israel had hoped that its withdrawal from Lebanon would motivate the Lebanese Government to ensure peace and security on the border, as is its obligation under international law, this has not been the case. The terrorist organization Hezbollah continues its aggression against Israel through cross-border attacks with mortars, missiles and rockets; the abduction and murder of Israeli soldiers and civilians; border incursions; and road-side bombs.

Last October, Hezbollah abducted and murdered three Israeli soldiers patrolling the Israeli side of the Blue Line. This October, Hezbollah twice launched major unprovoked assaults on Israel, using mortars and anti-tank shells. Both the Secretary-General and the Security Council have clearly rejected any suggestion that the use of force by Hezbollah, or any terrorist organization, is a legitimate substitute for the peaceful resolution of disputes. If there is any need for further evidence of this principle, resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1377 (2001) reaffirm that no State can allow its territory to be used as a base for cross-border terrorist attacks.

The Secretary-General himself made the following observations in his report of 22 January 2001:

> "The greatest cause of concern ... were the attacks across the Blue Line in the Shebaa farms area, which were deliberate acts in ... breach of the decisions of the Security Council." (*S/2001/66, para. 18*)

> "The simplest and most direct way to ensure calm in the area is for the parties to act in accordance with the decisions of the Security Council ... This implies that the Government of Lebanon asserts its effective authority and maintains law and order throughout its territory up to the line identified by the United Nations. That is its right and duty, consistently upheld by the Security Council and paid for with the lives of United Nations soldiers." (*ibid., para. 19*)

Israel has repeatedly called upon the Government of Lebanon to fulfil its obligations under international law, as required in resolution 425 (1978) and subsequent resolutions. Despite those pleas, the Government of Lebanon has failed to restrain Hezbollah. To the contrary, Lebanon has effectively granted control of southern Lebanon to Hezbollah, a situation that gives that organization free rein to train terrorists and to organize and perpetrate lethal terrorist attacks at will.

A continuation of the present situation carries with it a danger of escalation that could further imperil the safety and security of civilians on both sides of the Blue Line. The only way to avoid such a situation is for

Lebanon to act immediately to fulfil its responsibilities under resolutions 425 (1978) and 1310 (2000), and adhere to the stipulations of resolution 1373 (2001) regarding the suppression of terrorism and terrorist organizations, thereby bringing its policies into accord with the directives of the United Nations and the will of the international community. For a country that speaks so loudly and so often about the importance of international legitimacy, Lebanon would be well served to heed not only the calls of the international community, but those of its own high-minded rhetoric as well.

When addressing the threat to peace and stability posed by terrorism, one cannot ignore the fact that terrorist organizations are capable of acting as they do only because they are supported, encouraged, financed and harboured by States. In the case of Hezbollah, that support comes from other regimes in the Middle East, namely the Governments of Syria and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Government of Syria plays a crucial role in facilitating Hezbollah's continuing aggression against Israel. Syria allows Hezbollah to maintain training facilities in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley, and grants its terrorists safe harbour on Syrian territory. Damascus remains the primary transit point for arms transfers to Hezbollah's operatives in the field.

Syria also permits numerous other terrorist organizations to maintain their headquarters in Damascus, including Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine — General Command, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The Palestinian terrorist organization Hamas was allowed to open a new main office in Damascus in March. These organizations have proudly claimed responsibility for scores of terrorist attacks against Israel over the years, including yesterday's suicide bus bombing near Pardes Hannah and Tuesday's shooting rampage in Afula. Many of those organizations also maintain training facilities in the Bekaa Valley and receive aid and logistical support from the Syrian Government.

It is particularly distressing that Syrian support for anti-Israel terror has continued even as the world has united to combat the common threat of terrorism, even as Syria has participated in peace negotiations aimed at ending the long-standing state of war between our two countries, and even as Syria was elected a non-permanent member of the Security Council.

The most recent attempts to conclude a comprehensive peace on the basis of the framework established at the Madrid Peace Conference were the meetings between former Prime Minister Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Shara' held in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, in January 2000. The Syrian side broke off those talks after Israel presented an extensive offer for territorial compromise.

Nevertheless, only days ago Foreign Minister Shimon Peres publicly stated Israel's readiness to resume negotiations with Syria, immediately and without preconditions, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The Islamic Republic of Iran has long been the primary supporter of Hezbollah, and has had a supporting role in that organization's attacks not only on northern Israel, but also on Jewish and Israeli targets around the world, including the bombings of the Israeli Embassy and Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires.

As is widely known, Iran also actively supports, finances, arms and trains terrorists sent to attack Israel by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas organizations. Iran is also actively pursuing the acquisition and construction of a non-conventional weapon strike capability, including chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. Estimates give Iran several years until it fields nuclear weapons, but chemical weapons have already been used by Iran in retaliation for similar use by Iraq.

With the Shihab-3 long-range missile, a weapon with a 1,300-kilometre range, Iran has the capacity to reach Israeli cities. When it was paraded through the streets of Tehran in September of 1998, the inscription on the missile carrier declared "Israel should be wiped off the map". Given Iran's naked hostility towards a sovereign State, its weapons build-up must be a matter of concern to the international community as a whole.

Relations between Israel and Iran have not always been like this. However, since the overthrow of the Shah and the branding of Israel as the "Small Satan", Iranian officials have continually called for jihad and the destruction of the State of Israel. The language of Iran's leaders reflects a total negation of Israel that transcends any difference there may be over our

respective foreign policies. The Iranian press has also praised terrorist attacks against Israel, including the attack on the Dolphinarium nightclub in Tel Aviv, where 23 young people were massacred.

Meanwhile, on Iran's doorstep sits Iraq, a country that not only nurtures terrorism in order to conduct a war by proxy, but also feels perfectly comfortable perpetrating atrocities on its own. Iraq's regional aspirations and its motivation to acquire weapons of mass destruction are as strong as ever. Iraq has persisted in its attempts to develop non-conventional weapons and their means of delivery, much of this below the radar of international arms inspectors, who have been denied access to monitor Iraq's weapons programme for more than three years.

This is particularly troubling in the light of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's repeated hostile declarations against Israel and other nations and his proven enthusiasm for firing missiles at civilian populations in Israel, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and even against his own citizens. Even today, Iraq continues to level unprovoked threats against the State of Israel.

Iraq's continuing rejection of Israel's right to exist, its history of aggression and non-compliance with United Nations resolutions, its capabilities in chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and its lack of compunction in attacking civilian targets underscore the continuing threat it poses to the people of the region. The international community must continue to strenuously pressure Iraq in order to guarantee its compliance with international law and to ensure that it does not possess the capability to threaten regional security.

The desire for peace with our neighbours represents the supreme goal of the State of Israel and its citizens. Since 1948, Israel has demonstrated a willingness to make compromises in pursuit of peace and to constantly search for new peacemaking initiatives.

As our Foreign Minister eloquently described in his statement before the general debate just a few weeks ago, the world is changing before our eyes. New opportunities await all nations with the courage to embrace them. The territorial conflicts of the past are meaningless in a world where we are so tightly connected, so intimately interdependent and where we are quickly becoming, in a very real sense, united nations.

Israel's vision of peace is one of clearly defined borders that would eliminate territorial disputes, of a regional security framework that would curb the threat posed by extremists and reduce the need for States to expend copious amounts of resources to ensure their defence. We envision a future in which all peoples are free to determine their own destiny in mutual dignity and security. We envision a peace that would improve the lives of all the peoples of the Middle East and that could open the door to economic growth and foreign investment.

But as tantalizingly close as this bold new cooperative world may appear, a vast ocean still divides us. The primary threat that separates the Middle East from the incredible opportunities of our age is the threat of terrorism bred by violent fundamentalist ideologies, many of them breeding just beyond Israel's border. Only by denouncing these ideologies and eradicating the terrorist organizations that espouse them can we hope to engage in meaningful and productive dialogue that will open the Middle East to the possibilities that await it and provide a better future for the peoples of the region.

On 11 September, the world awoke to a reality that has plagued Israel for decades, the reality of State-sponsored terrorist aggression. In the aftermath of those horrific attacks, the world discovered things that Israel has long understood: that terrorism poses a threat to all free peoples, that terror knows no borders, nationality, race or religion, that terror can exist only with the support and complicity of States and that fighting terror means waging an unrelenting and uncompromising campaign.

Israel has been on the front lines of this campaign since its very inception. Indeed, in our region terrorists continue to arm themselves, clerics continue to inspire them, and certain regimes continue to encourage them, all with aim of preventing peace and coexistence from taking root in the Middle East.

Terrorism is the primary threat of the new millennium. The attempts by the United Nations and certain concerned nations to facilitate the resolution of long-standing conflicts and animosities in the Middle East will be hamstrung if they do not address terror. And if we do not resolutely address terror, the Middle East peace process will not be the only victim.

Peace in the Middle East need not be a dream, and endless confrontation need not be our only reality.

But in order to reach peace, there must be an unshakeable commitment — both ethical and political — to non-violence, to ending terror and to embracing dialogue and negotiations. This is a commitment that must be assumed by the regional leadership for the sake of future generations. Surely, if this commitment is made, the triumph of peace, a true peace, will be the triumph for all people in the Middle East and for all generations to come.

Mr. Listre (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Ten years ago, in October 1991, the delegations participating in the Madrid Peace Conference undertook to work on the quest for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

In subsequent negotiations, Israel and the Palestinian Authority recognized their mutual political rights and accepted the principle of a peaceful coexistence lived in dignity and security. They also committed themselves to negotiating a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of their differences. Both parties thus accepted the principle that peace and reconciliation could be achieved only through a process of diplomatic negotiations and not by means of violence.

In sharp contrast to those commitments and praiseworthy aspirations, in the last 14 months the Middle East has again been submerged in an escalation of violence that puts at risk the achievements made since the Madrid Peace Conference.

As a result of the intensification of fighting thousands of Palestinians and Israelis have been killed or wounded. I would like to reiterate on this occasion the heartfelt condolences of the Argentine people and Government to the families of all the victims, whom global television brings to us every night on the news programmes.

Recently, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process stated that the situation in the region was the worst it has been in the last 10 years. This statement is a demonstration of the extreme seriousness of the current situation and of the urgency of avoiding the abyss of a widespread conflict throughout the region.

There is no doubt that the Middle East must rediscover an outlook oriented towards peace. Israelis, Palestinians and the international community cannot let the logic of violence prevail, the suffering of innocent civilians continue or the hatred between the peoples deepen. The cost of indifference is very high in terms of human lives.

At the recent general debate of the General Assembly, the President of the Argentine Republic, Fernando de la Rúa, reaffirmed my country's traditional support for achieving a stable and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the respect for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish an independent State, as well as the right of Israel to live within safe and internationally recognized borders. He also said that the use of violence and terrorism in all their forms was absolutely unacceptable and would only worsen the situation, and that the parties should urgently agree on a ceasefire and begin negotiations on a final agreement that until not long ago seemed within reach.

In the course of the same debate, the main parties to the conflict reaffirmed their commitment to the peace process and emphasized the need to put an end to the current state of affairs. In this regard, the Foreign Minister of Israel, Shimon Peres, recognized that the creation of an independent Palestinian State was the best option for Israel. Such a State would enable the Palestinians to exercise their freedoms, prosper economically, maintain their traditions and enjoy the highest level of education. For his part, President Yasser Arafat expressed his commitment to peace as the only guarantee for freedom and security for Israelis, Palestinians and all the peoples of the Middle East.

Likewise, the President of the United States of America, George W. Bush, expressed his commitment to work towards a day when two States — one Israeli, the other Palestinian — live peacefully together, within secure and recognized borders. The announcements made later by Secretary of State Colin Powell in Louisville, Kentucky, were also very constructive and of particular relevance.

These statements demonstrate the existence of a consensus view that the only way to peace, justice and security in the Middle East is through negotiations. Violence will not solve the problems of the region. On the contrary, it will only make them worse.

It is for this reason that we once again call on the parties to observe a ceasefire, in accordance with the Tenet plan, and to move rapidly on implementing the recommendations of the Mitchell report. We must

recall that principle among the recommendations of the report are the efforts that the Palestinian Authority must make to end violence and the need for Israel to halt all settlement activity.

With regard to the acts of violence, the Palestinian Authority must send clear-cut signals to Palestinians and Israelis alike that terrorism and violence are unacceptable and that it will make a 100 per cent effort to prevent these types of acts and to punish the perpetrators.

All activity related to Israeli settlements should be frozen, including the so-called natural growth of the existing ones. In accordance with international law, such settlements are illegal and constitute a violation of the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

The cessation of violence, the resumption of security cooperation and the establishment of confidence-building measures are all essential to the resumption of negotiations. Yet none of these measures will be sustained for long unless the parties return in earnest to the negotiating table and continue with the process that began a decade ago.

To achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, as is called for in the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, progress should be made in all aspects of the peace process.

The question of Palestine should be solved on the basis of the full implementation in good faith of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principles of the Madrid Conference, the Oslo accords and other agreements reached by the parties. In the quest for a definitive solution to this conflict every effort should be made to reconcile the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians to their material independence and personal dignity and the legitimate right of Israel to recognition and security.

In the south of Lebanon, the full implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) is essential. We believe that in the current circumstances all parties should exercise utmost restraint and self-control, respect the "blue line" established by the United Nations, and abstain from carrying out or tolerating acts of provocation that can increase the tension along that line.

In respect of the Golan Heights, resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) call for a withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the territories occupied in 1967. In that regard, we are concerned about the lack of dialogue between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel to implement those resolutions and we call upon both parties to resume the dialogue in a frank and constructive manner, taking into account the principle "land for peace".

One of the dimensions of the United Nations responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine has been the personal commitment of successive Secretaries-General to the peace process. Argentina strongly supports the efforts of Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan to persuade the parties to cease violence and to return to the negotiating table. Likewise, my country commends the action taken by the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Terje Roed-Larsen, who has continued to work indefatigably in the same direction. We also support the efforts of the United States, the European Union and other international actors to put back on track the peace process.

The situation in the Middle East is at one of the most difficult and delicate junctures. If the parties do not return to the negotiating table, they will face the prospect of continued fighting in the years to come. We hope that the peoples in the Middle East can live, work and prosper together, because history and geography have destined them to exist side by side. Israeli and Arab political leaders have to act decisively to rekindle in their peoples the commitment to peace. We are conscious that this task will be difficult, but we also know that the path to peace is the only alternative for all inhabitants of the region.

Mr. Abdullah (Brunei Darussalam): Since this is the first time I am taking the floor, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at this session. I am confident that you will guide us well, and we look forward to working closely with you.

The extremely precarious situation in the Middle East is a cause of deep concern for Brunei Darussalam. With the increasing rate of violence, especially in the Palestinian occupied territories, peace in that region appears more elusive than ever. However, the international community cannot afford to let the efforts and achievements of the past decade wane. We must

instead build on them. The task of restoring and fostering a climate of trust is essential to the resumption of the peace process. Some measures of restraint need to be exercised, and it is important that the conflicting parties end all acts of violence.

In that regard, recent attempts to bring concerned parties to the negotiating table is very much appreciated. We support initiatives undertaken by Senator George Mitchell and welcome the recommendations made in the Mitchell report, released in April this year. We also welcome the recent initiatives of the United States to try to secure a truce between the parties concerned. This initiative will be significant in paving the way for progress by all parties concerned on diplomatic fronts.

At the same time, the United Nations as an institution charged with the maintenance of international peace and security, has a role in this issue that is also crucial. Through its various efforts and activities, the United Nations should continue to assume its responsibility towards all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner.

Brunei Darussalam believes that peace in the Middle East would be possible only with a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian territory, including the dismantlement of illegal settlements, are essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process.

It is encouraging to note that the international community has unequivocally pronounced its support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. In that regard, we welcome the statement made by President Bush in support of the establishment of the Palestinian State.

To conclude, the issue before us no doubt warrants our urgent and utmost attention. We must not stand idly by, watching the dramatic developments pass us by without giving due regard to the tragic loss of lives. The international community must therefore act with determination and do all it can to bring peace to the Middle East.

Mr. Thayeb (Indonesia): Since we convened a year ago to consider the situation in the Middle East, the lack of progress in the peace process continues to claim our collective attention. Regrettably, the peace that we had hoped for, heralded by the Madrid Peace Conference a decade ago, which would have been implemented on two tracks — one between Israel and the Palestinians and the other between Israel and the other Arab countries — lies in a state of relapse.

On the Palestinian track, we are seeing the occupied territories rapidly becoming embroiled in a state of turmoil and turbulence. Since September 2000 hundreds of Palestinians have lost their lives due to the disproportionate use of military force by the occupying Power. Worsening the situation still further is the untenable practice of closures and economic blockades, which have dramatically increased the level of poverty, misery and suffering.

Moreover, the relentless repression manifested by the confiscation of Palestinian lands and the demolition of houses to expand the occupying Power's settlements is definitely not conducive to reviving the peace process. To the contrary, this has exacerbated the already tense atmosphere, fuelling the conflict to almost dangerous proportions, for there have not been in recent years such deeply entrenched feelings of frustration and disillusionment as a result of the policies of occupation.

The Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations are similarly at a standstill, for the basic premise remains the same: that there can be no peace until occupation ceases. The fact that the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force continues to be renewed is reflective of the tense environment between the two sides. It is therefore pertinent to take not of the observations made in the report of the Secretary-General that,

> "Despite the present quiet in the Israel-Syria sector, the situation in the Middle East continues to be potentially dangerous and is likely to remain so, unless and until a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached." (*S/2001/499, para. 11*)

We are pleased to note that in Lebanon, following the withdrawal of the occupying Power last year, the situation was marked by general stability throughout the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. However, we should remain vigilant in case of sporadic violations of Lebanese airspace, as such incidents have the potential to undermine the

stability of the region. Hence, it is important that all parties respect the Blue Line, as called for by the Security Council, and refrain from taking any action to destabilize the situation. While the Government of Lebanon has taken some limited steps to restore its authority in the formerly occupied areas, we look forward to the day when the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country will be fully restored.

In the Middle East region there is a yearning for peace, a yearning that perhaps far surpasses any known in the past, and the track towards attaining a durable and comprehensive peace is well marked by numerous decisions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, and the successful outcome of the entire peace process depends on their implementation.

In the final analysis, the challenges ahead are immense, but we must ensure that the region does not relapse into strife and struggle. We must seize the opportunity to bring the parties together and render the peace endeavours an irreversible turning point in history. The hopes and interests of the peoples of the Middle East, and indeed of the whole world, call for the achievement of true peace, common security and generalized prosperity.

Mr. Satoh (Japan): I would like to express my appreciation for your leadership, Mr. President, in convening this meeting in a very timely manner to discuss the situation in the Middle East.

The acts of violence that have occurred continuously in this region for more than a year are extremely detrimental to efforts to attain a durable peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The Government of Japan calls upon all parties concerned to exercise self-restraint and to put an end to the violence immediately.

The only way to resolve any conflict is through dialogue and negotiation based on the firm determination of the parties concerned to work for peace. We therefore ask both the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities concerned to make the utmost efforts to resume the peace process in accordance with the Tenet plan and the Mitchell report.

In this connection, we welcome Secretary of State Colin Powell's statement, on 19 November, of the firm commitment of the United States Government to actively engage in the Middle East peace process and his prompt dispatch of Assistant Secretary of State Bill Burns and General Anthony Zinni to the region. It is beyond any doubt that the active involvement of the United States is essential for the progress of the peace process. The Government of Japan strongly urges both parties to respond to such efforts of the United States.

Furthermore, the constructive engagement of many other countries interested in the peace and development of the region is necessary in order to move the peace process forward. We welcome the initiatives taken by a number of European countries in this context.

The Government of Japan, for its part, is determined to extend as much support and cooperation as possible to the peace process. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka have repeatedly called on both parties to end the violence, restore mutual confidence and resume the peace process in accordance with the Mitchell report.

It is also an important task of the international community to assist the development and the sustained growth of the Palestinian economy, in parallel with the efforts to seek peace in the Middle East. In recognition of this, since 1993 the Government of Japan has provided economic assistance amounting to more than $600 million for such purposes as helping to cover the necessary cost of establishing the Palestinian Authority, constructing economic and social infrastructure, building schools and hospitals and creating employment. It has also provided emergency assistance amounting to approximately $40 million in order to alleviate the serious economic difficulties of the Palestinians caused by the situation since September of last year.

Moreover, the Government of Japan has been making substantial contributions to the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as one of its leading donors.

The economic difficulties of Palestinians are becoming increasingly grave. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to stress the importance of further efforts by the international community to support the Palestinian people.

The Government of Japan has consistently supported the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people, including their right to establish an independent State. It has also supported the right of Israel to live in peace within secure and recognized

borders. History has shown that achieving both of these objectives is by no means an easy task. But history has also demonstrated that in the 1990s some concrete steps were achieved towards making both objectives compatible, thanks to the efforts of the countries concerned. The Government of Japan sincerely hopes that the day will soon come when two States, Israel and Palestine, will live together peacefully within secure and recognized borders.

With the terrorist attacks on 11 September as a turning point, there is a new momentum for cooperation in the international community which transcends religious, racial and cultural differences. On the question of peace in the Middle East, too, it is important for the parties concerned to seize this opportunity to redouble their efforts to move forward to a durable peace in the region based on a spirit of harmony and cooperation. The Government of Japan is determined to do its utmost to support such efforts.

Mr. Maquieira (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): As in previous years, my delegation wishes to reiterate that Chile's position on the situation in the Middle East is one of strict respect for the principles of international law.

Chile wishes to reiterate what was stated in the declaration on the crisis in the Middle East that the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Rio Group issued at their meeting of 14 November, on the occasion of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly. Chile also reaffirms its support for Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which created the legal framework for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the conflict that is the subject of our debate.

Accordingly, we recognize the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to form an independent, viable and democratic State, as well as Israel's right to exist within secure and internationally recognized borders.

We note with concern, and we regret, that the peace process negotiations begun in Oslo in 1993 have been suspended, giving way to a spiral of violence, retaliation and the excessive use of force, which are an offence to the principles of all civilizations and constitute an ongoing violation of the human rights of innocent civilians in both countries. As the Security Council President, Ambassador Durrant of Jamaica, said so well yesterday, it would be irresponsible and absolutely unacceptable to allow this situation to continue.

My Government considers this situation to be all the more serious, given the dark shadow the current terrorist threat casts on world peace. We therefore welcome the mediation efforts of the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union, the United Nations Special Coordinator and other international actors, who have proposed new initiatives aimed at creating an environment conducive to dialogue between the parties.

In this regard, we wish to make a clear and explicit appeal to the parties to the conflict to cease immediately all acts of violence and to return as soon as possible to the peace process negotiations, which the international community has proposed for that purpose, especially through the implementation in good faith of the measures and timetables contained in the Mitchell plan. We hope that the negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians will proceed without interruption; that the parties will abandon rigid positions that do not contribute to placing dialogue above violence; and that they will not take unilateral measures that might affect progress in the dialogue or prejudge the final outcome of the talks.

We hope that the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel will soon resume their talks on the Golan Heights, in fulfilment of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Chile maintains excellent relations with the State of Israel, the neighbouring Arab countries and the Palestinian National Authority. All the peoples that came to our country grew and developed, as did their descendants, thus helping Chile to grow and develop as well. It is therefore understandable that our people and our Government fervently look forward to an end to the conflict in a land that is three times holy and aspires to seeing an era of peace take root in the region so that the deep wounds that scar the land can heal and be forgotten.

Mr. Yahaya (Malaysia): Without exception, this year, as in previous years, scores of resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly have reiterated the need for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East that would include a just and final settlement of the Palestinian question. Regrettably, such peace remains as elusive as ever, even when many conflict situations in other parts of the world have long been resolved.

instead of peace, we continue to witness unmitigated violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem.

The situation in the Middle East continues to be a matter of grave concern to the international community. We note that the Secretary-General, in paragraph 5 of his report contained in document A/56/642, has observed that

> "the present Israeli-Palestinian crisis has entered its second year with an escalation of violence, while the peace process remains stalled despite many international efforts to revive it".

My delegation has time and again stressed that it is imperative, if enduring peace is to be achieved in the Middle East, for the peace process to be revived on an urgent basis. As the Secretary-General aptly stated, "In fact, we are dealing with the worst crisis in the Middle East since the 1993 Oslo Agreement."(*ibid.*)

We must rekindle faith in a peaceful solution of the conflict and douse any prospects of a return to a full-fledged war.

The international community should move to condemn the general policy of oppression and suppression carried out by the occupying Power over the Arab population in the occupied Arab territories, including Jerusalem, beyond condemning the ongoing assault on Palestinian civilians, as manifested by the ongoing confiscation of lands, demolition of Arab-owned houses and relentless expansion of illegal Jewish settlements in the occupied Arab territories. Clearly, the continuation of these policies is not conducive to reviving the peace process. On the contrary, they contribute to exacerbating the current tense situation, thereby fuelling the conflict. We fail to appreciate the logic of these provocative and inhumane policies and practices, unless they are deliberately intended to prolong the conflict, for reasons best known to the State of Israel.

The continued occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel constitutes a serious impediment to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. It is also regrettable that there has been no progress in the peace talks between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic that have been suspended since 1996. My delegation is deeply concerned that the inhabitants of the Syrian Golan continue to live under Israeli occupation, with all the deprivation, humiliation and other indignities that life under occupation entails. The continued existence and expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan remains a major stumbling block to a resumption of the Syrian-Israeli peace process, and this again calls into question Israel's seriousness about seeking peace.

We call on Israel to resume peace negotiations on the principle of land for peace, which is the only thing that will guarantee its long-term peace and security in the region. Malaysia reiterates its call for the withdrawal of all occupation forces to the line of 4 June 1967 as an indispensable element in any peace settlement for the region. We look forward to the early return of the Syrian Golan as an integral part of a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Mr. Balzan (Malta), Vice-President, took the Chair

On the issue of Lebanon, my delegation is seriously concerned about the serious air, sea and land violations of the withdrawal line — the Blue Line. We urge Israel to put an end to these breaches and also to respect the safety of the personnel of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). These violations have the potential to ignite an explosive situation in what is essentially a still stable region.

My delegation takes this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, who is also the Secretary-General's Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and Mr. Staffan de Mistura, the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to southern Lebanon. We condemn them for their tireless efforts in coordinating United Nations and international assistance to the Palestinian people and Lebanon, respectively. We also wish to commend the men and women who are serving, and have served, with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and UNIFIL for their courage and dedication in a difficult and often dangerous environment, risking life and limb in the cause of international peace and security.

It is now universally acknowledged that a just, comprehensive and lasting solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is possible only through a negotiated political settlement. This must include Israel's complete withdrawal from all Arab and Palestinian land occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem and the

occupied Syrian Golan, the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and the recognition of the principle of the right of return for Arabs who have been displaced during the decades of conflict. If comprehensive and lasting peace remains the goal of the current Government in Israel, it cannot continue to deny the rights of the Palestinians and, equally, other Arabs living in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Mr. Kpotsra (Togo) (*spoke in French*): This year, the General Assembly is once again taking up the situation in the Middle East in a context that gives little reason for optimism. Not only have the many efforts made by the international community, in particular since the Oslo conference, with a view to a just, final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict, fallen far short of making it possible to reach the desired results, but, even worse, the growing deterioration of the situation on the ground for the last 14 months has also significantly blocked the peace process that was about to yield results.

The result of this worsening of violence and repression is, unfortunately, well known. It simply defies understanding. Faced with such a situation, we can only express our regret that the appeal launched on 7 October by the Security Council in resolution 1322 (2000) was not heeded. It was an appeal that hostilities be immediately brought to a halt and that all necessary measures be taken to put an end to the infernal cycle of violence. It is just as deplorable that the provisions of the accord signed at Sharm el-sheik in October 2000, as well as the recommendations submitted by the Fact-Finding Committee established under that accord, have not yet been implemented.

My delegation believes that the path leading to the restoration of confidence and the resumption of the peace process requires, on the part of the Israeli Government, just as on the part of the Palestinian Authority, a prompt and rigorous execution of the commitments to which they subscribed at Sharm el-Sheikh in October 2000 and at Taba in January 2001.

To that end, it is imperative that they urgently take all necessary and concrete measures to end the present confrontation, maintain calm and prevent the outbreak of new acts of violence. Everything must be done to bring about a return to the situation that prevailed before the present crisis, in particular by restoring law and order; strengthening cooperation in security matters; and putting an end to the economic blockade of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Furthermore, each party must endeavour to discourage, identify and condemn all acts that incite violence, as these can only perpetuate the cycle of violence and give rise to additional resentment. From that standpoint, the proposals contained in the Tenet plan regarding the ceasefire seem to offer a positive solution and should be implemented without further delay. It also seems essential for the Israeli Government to proceed to a systematic moratorium on any settlement activities.

In this way a climate could be established that would be conducive to the resumption of negotiations. These should take place on the basis of the accords and arrangements concluded before 28 September 2000, so that the momentum for peace that emerged from the Madrid Conference and the Oslo accords can be sustained.

In considering the situation in the Middle East, one cannot overemphasize the ongoing responsibility of the international community with respect to the achievement of a satisfactory settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on internationally binding resolutions. That is why my delegation congratulates the Secretary-General once again on the effective and determined action he is tirelessly undertaking in seeking a solution to the crisis.

The very decisive role played by the sponsors of the Middle East peace process must be noted. In that regard, as emphasized by the head of the Togolese delegation during the general debate, Togo is pleased at the recent positive developments with respect to prospects for the establishment of a Palestinian State that would coexist with Israel within internationally recognized borders.

However, the hopes generated by advances in the international situation and by the positive initiatives currently under way cannot obscure the fact that the Security Council has not fulfilled its primary role under the Charter as the body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine, and a fortiori to understand, how the Security Council, during this critical period, could have been unable to take the measures expected of it to prevent the situation in the region from deteriorating following the events of September 2000. Its ineffectiveness was made evident

to all when, on 27 March 2001, it was unable to adopt the draft resolution before it — submitted on the initiative of those of its members belonging to the Non-Aligned Movement — on the dispatch of an observation mission to the occupied Palestinian territories. There is no doubt that the deployment of that mission would have had a deterrent effect on the escalation of terrorism and on the continuation of acts of violence and would have helped gradually to restore confidence, leading to the implementation of the recommendations of the Mitchell report.

Today we express our deep hope that the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority will decide once and for all to demonstrate the necessary political will to bring about an end to the cycle of violence, a restoration of the climate of confidence and a resumption of the peace process. This is a prerequisite if we wish the efforts of the international community to supplement in a useful way those that the parties themselves are called upon to undertake with a view to bringing about peace in the Middle East — a peace whose primary requirements are a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the restoration of the Golan to Syria and a total end to the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon.

Mr. Buallay (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): The question of Palestine is at the core of the dispute in the Middle East. Current developments in the Palestinian territories pose a threat to security, stability and vital interests in the region and beyond. The international community, and in particular the co-sponsors of the peace process, are therefore in duty bound to shoulder their responsibility to provide protection for the Palestinian people. These include the dispatch of international forces to ensure security and to put the peace process back on track towards its objectives, through the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), as well as other relevant international resolutions calling on Israel fully to withdraw from the Arab territories occupied in the Syrian Arab Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, as well as the remaining Lebanese territory under occupation, and full recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to return and to establish an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

In this regard, the State of Bahrain, through a telephone conversation between His Highness the Emir of Bahrain and President George W. Bush of the United States of America, expressed its appreciation for the statements made by President Bush supporting the establishment of a Palestinian State on the basis of internationally binding resolutions.

The State of Bahrain stresses that this stance on the part of the United States of America has had a positive impact on the security and stability of the Middle East and on the peace process. The State of Bahrain appreciates the decision by the United States of America to seek a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Shaikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Bahrain, in his statement before the General Assembly on Tuesday, 13 November 2001, also welcomed the statement made by President Bush regarding the right of the Palestinian people to establish their own State. That right is supported by the majority of the States of the world and is finding increased support from the international community.

We welcome also the statement made by the Secretary of State of the United States, Colin Powell, in Louisville, Kentucky, when he spoke of two States — Palestinian and Israeli — in addition to discussing the Israeli occupation of areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority. However, the most important matter he raised pertained to the fact that the United States Government was prepared to initiate diplomatic efforts to restart peace talks aimed at a settlement by appointing General Zinni and Mr. Burns as members of the working group created for that purpose.

The important thing now is to find a mechanism for implementation, because this troubled region is in dire need of a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Middle East region is the birthplace of human civilizations and divine religions. Unfortunately, Arabs and Muslims from the region are now the target of deliberate defamation campaigns carried out by certain parties whose objectives are suspect and who try to link Islam with terrorism. This is neither just nor equitable. Indeed, it is unjust, because the behaviour of certain individuals is being generalized to defame a whole remarkable culture and religion — namely the Arab-Islamic civilization that calls for cultural and civilizational interaction and dialogue.

Many thinkers and leaders in the West have made positive statements with regard to Islam and the Islamic culture, disassociating that culture from international terrorism, which does not represent any civilization, religion or nation. Wise voices have also warned against expressions of enmity towards the Arab-Islamic civilization, one of the largest civilizations in the history of the world, which will only grow stronger and more influential as the campaign against Arabs and Muslims continues to rage.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At a time when foreign occupation has subsided in most areas of the world, the General Assembly is once again resuming its discussion of the situation in the Middle East: the occupation by Israel of Arab territories in Palestine and Syria, in addition to the Lebanese Shebaa farmlands. Although the terrorist attacks on the United States of America in September, and the effect they have had on the global situation, still cast a heavy shadow over our work, those tragic events cannot conceal from the attention of the international community and the media the violence that is taking place in the occupied Palestinian territory. This violence is the result of the extreme aggression by Israel aimed at denying the Palestinian people their political, humanitarian and economic rights and their right to statehood, and to obliterate their national identity.

As all Members know, the essence of the struggle in the Middle East is the question of Palestine, which has been a central concern of the United Nations ever since its inception. It is regrettable that Israel has provided no evidence that its future policy will be aimed at achieving a just and comprehensive solution to the question of the Middle East.

Various influential international parties have responded to the situation, most recently, Mr. Colin Powell, the United States Secretary of State, whose vision includes some positive aspects of great significance.

Lebanon is still suffering from Israeli aggression — the daily violation of its sovereignty, airspace, territory and territorial waters, including the flagrant use of force deep inside Lebanon. The Israeli air force engages in threatening acts on a daily basis in the skies above Lebanon, spreading terror among civilians, especially schoolchildren. Israeli war vessels constantly enter Lebanese territorial waters and commit acts of provocation against fishing boats. This was referred to in the report of the Secretary-General of June last, in which the Israeli violations were described as provocations.

In this context, we should recall that the Israeli withdrawal that began in May 2000 has not yet been completed. Security Council resolution 425 (1978) called for full Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory. It is well-known that complete withdrawal should include withdrawal from Lebanese airspace and territorial waters and from the Shebaa farmlands. Syria has recognized the Lebanese identity of that land, as recorded in official documents and reports of the General Assembly and the Security Council; no other party or State has a claim to the Shebaa farmlands.

Israel still retains 31 Lebanese people as hostages in its prisons, some of whom have been there for 25 years without trial, in flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and its relevant Protocols. Israel left about 130,000 landmines in the liberated territory of Lebanon, as a result of which dozens of people have been killed and more than 100 people are permanently disabled. The Israeli authorities are still denying us copies of more than 60 per cent of the maps that show where the mines are located. The Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and western Bekaa, which lasted for over 22 years, has led to great loss and damage, affecting infrastructure, housing, farms, schools, power stations and bridges, has caused death and injury to thousands and has retarded development and growth. Appropriate reparations to Lebanon for such actions is required under international humanitarian law. Lebanon will spare no effort to appeal to specialized international, judicial and political organs in seeking redress.

I reaffirm once again that Lebanon is determined to preserve its internationally recognized borders, which were demarcated in 1923 and reaffirmed under the Lebanese-Israeli truce of 1949, making it clear that the so-called blue line, to which Israel withdrew, did not constitute the international border. We have three reservations with regard to that issue, which are included in the Secretary-General's report of 16 June 2000.

Lebanon is determined to preserve its right of sovereignty over the Shebaa farmlands and its authority and sovereignty over the sites delineated by the United

Nations Disengagement Observer Force on Mount Hermon.

Ten years ago, the entire world looked to Madrid, where a peace conference was held, with the participation of all the parties to the conflict, under the sponsorship of Russia and the United States. We hoped for a just and comprehensive settlement. Both parties, Arab and Israeli, achieved promising progress on all tracks. Then, all of a sudden, Israel decided to give priority to the use of force instead of the principles of justice and right based on international law. In September 2000, Israel, represented by Ariel Sharon, now the Prime Minister, took the provocative step of violating the Al-Aqsa mosque, an action that began the cycle of violence.

Now we are witnessing human massacres and methodical destruction of cities, towns and farms. It is regrettable that the international community, especially the Security Council, is unable to shoulder its responsibilities to preserve international peace and security by taking the necessary measures to stop the grave deterioration in the region.

The requirements for peace in the Middle East are well known. They are based on a completion of the Israeli withdrawal from the rest of occupied Lebanese territory, namely Shebaa farms, and the recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people to establish their own independent State with Jerusalem as its capital and to exercise the right of return, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and the right of self-determination and to life within secure borders, in addition to Israel's full withdrawal from the Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, based on resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), the Madrid framework of reference and its principle of land for peace, and halting all provocative practices in occupied Palestine, occupied Golan and Lebanon.

Lebanon is committed to the peace process, which has been rendered void of substance by Israel. We see no future in the Israeli Government's policy of carrying out unjust security measures and State terrorism at the expense of the requirements for a just and comprehensive peace.

Lebanon, which is a democratic Arab country open to the world, has a civilization that dates back 5,000 years. We have been living in harmony, coexistence and dialogue because of our unique social and cultural fabric. We call on the Assembly to rally the forces of justice and peace to put an end to the historic injustice being inflicted on the Palestinian people and a definitive end to one of the most dangerous and complex regional conflicts in the Middle East, which is exhausting the riches of our peoples and hindering their progress and contribution to the world. This would allow us to participate in a global partnership under the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Mr. Daoth (Australia): For Australia, events in the Middle East over the past year have intensified the sense of deep frustration we felt when violence broke out again towards the end of last year.

After the real and courageous progress that Israel and the Palestinians made in the first half of 2000, we watched with dismay and disappointment the provocation, violence and retaliation. Australia has repeatedly called at the highest levels for an immediate end to the violence and an early and effective resumption of negotiations. This is now more important than ever.

Australia remains committed to a negotiated settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. We remain strongly committed to the territorial integrity of Israel and the right of the people of Israel to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force, as affirmed in resolution 242 (1967). We are equally committed to the application of this principle to all States in the region.

Australia has consistently recognized the proper and legitimate right and aspiration of the Palestinian people to self-determination. We expect that a comprehensive, just and durable resolution of the region's conflict necessarily will include the establishment of a viable State for the Palestinian people, in accordance with the principles of resolution 242 (1967). The sooner that this can be achieved along agreed boundaries, the better. To that end, we continue to regard settlement activity in the territories occupied during the 1967 war as contrary to international law, provocative and deeply harmful to the peace process.

Australia will continue to play a positive and constructive role in support of peace in the region. We have maintained an active programme of development assistance to the Palestinian people for many years. This has included support for programmes to develop

democracy and good governance. Our programme of assistance will continue, with planned expenditure this year of around $9 million.

Almost half of this assistance will be allocated to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which remains the primary agency for the delivery of international assistance in the region to Palestinian refugees. We continue to value highly the work of UNRWA.

Australia will also continue its programme of bilateral assistance to the Palestinian Authority. This year, we have allocated more than $2 million for this purpose. We will also be continuing our support for the work of non-governmental organizations, including the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with around $3 million being earmarked for the Palestinian programmes of WFP and ICRC. In addition to our development assistance to the Palestinian people, this year Australia will provide almost $1 million through the WFP development pledge for Syria.

The Middle East is a region where the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles remains a major concern for the international community. Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is, moreover, a key component of the broader vision of peace in the Middle East. We strongly urge all States in the Middle East that have not already done so to become parties to all relevant international arms control and non-proliferation instruments. We urge those that are parties to those instruments to adhere to both their spirit and their letter.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) continues to provide a solid foundation for efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and work towards their elimination. Australia has consistently called upon the four countries — Cuba, India, Israel and Pakistan — which are not yet members of the NPT to join the Treaty as soon as possible. We do not consider that special security concerns should be a bar to NPT membership for any country.

Another critically important element of the nuclear non-proliferation regime is the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Many Middle Eastern States have signed the CTBT, and Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have ratified it. We take this opportunity to call upon all regional States yet to sign or ratify the CTBT to do so without delay, in particular those States whose ratification is a prerequisite for the Treaty's entry into force.

Middle Eastern members of the Conference on Disarmament have clear interests in pressing for early commencement of negotiations on a treaty ending the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons — a fissile material cut-off treaty. Conclusion of a cut-off treaty would be a further step to reduce tensions in the Middle East and is the logical next step on the nuclear arms control and disarmament agenda.

Australia urges those Middle Eastern States that have not yet done so to contribute to efforts to strengthen the global regime against anti-personnel landmines by ratifying the Ottawa Convention banning landmines. In addition, we call on all States to accede to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its Protocols, which, together, are an important instrument of international humanitarian law. We also encourage Middle Eastern States to join in efforts to prevent the destabilizing proliferation of long-range ballistic missiles, including through support for the international code of conduct on ballistic missile proliferation, to be launched late next year.

As the recent spate of anthrax cases shows clearly, the threat of chemical and biological weapons is immediate, real and indiscriminate. Australia urges all States to redouble their efforts to halt the spread and use of these heinous weapons. It is imperative that all States which have not yet done so sign and ratify both the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions. It is incumbent on all parties to ensure that these treaties work effectively and efficiently in the face of developing threats.

In every region, a positive security environment depends on States meeting their international obligations. We share the concern of others that the weapons verification and monitoring work in Iraq, mandated by the Security Council, has not been possible for nearly three years. The continued lack of assurance about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq can only have a destabilizing effect on the region as a whole. We call upon Iraq to cooperate fully with the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission to achieve full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions.

We also urge all Middle Eastern States to take effective legal measures to combat the threat to international peace and security posed by terrorism, in accordance with recent Security Council resolutions. These include becoming parties as soon as possible to the relevant international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism, denying safe haven to terrorists and those who support them and implementing appropriate national measures to prevent the financing of terrorism. Australia places great importance on early finalization of the draft comprehensive convention against terrorism. We urge Middle Eastern States to play a constructive and flexible role in efforts to seek compromise so that remaining differences in the text can be resolved.

Australia has been disappointed this past year at the lack of progress on the issues that so tragically divide the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and hold them back from the enjoyment and benefits of a full and free life. Nevertheless, we have been encouraged by the commitment and perseverance of the major players.

Although the present situation is difficult, we have a viable set of principles to guide us back to the path of a negotiated peace. The recommendations of the Mitchell report and of the Tenet plan are the vital and necessary steps to end the current violence. All parties should seek immediately to implement them in good faith. Only then can mutual confidence be rebuilt. This is necessary to enable them to address their historic grievances on the basis of security, individual dignity and mutual respect.

Compromise by all parties will be essential. We have seen that compromise is possible, even on the most deeply felt issues. Courage, leadership and flexibility will be required. These qualities have been displayed before and Australia now calls on the leaders of the region to show that they have these qualities in sufficient store to achieve the goal of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace for the region. Only then will they secure for their people that greatest of prizes, for now and for future generations: a bright, prosperous and safe future.

Mr. Sagach (Ukraine): For more than half a century, the situation in the Middle East has remained a subject of the close attention and deep concern of the United Nations and the international community at large. Continuous efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East have, at different periods, faced progress and setbacks, victories and failures.

The undeniable truth learned by all of us is that peace in the Middle East, as well as in any other conflict region, cannot be achieved by force. It can be reached only through dialogue. The most complicated and controversial negotiations can do much more than any act of violence, which inevitably results in the loss of human lives, destruction and despair. The experiences of Egypt and Jordan have clearly proved that peace agreements can be reached between the Israelis and the Arabs.

Ukraine has always been supportive of the Middle East peace process. We are convinced that there is no alternative for both Arabs and Israelis than to overcome violence, hostility and mistrust, to stop mutual accusations and, finally, to resume the negotiation process. There is no doubt that only lasting peace can provide security in all its political, economic and social aspects, long awaited by the peoples of the region. In order to achieve a viable solution, this process should be based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace, as well as other principles laid down at the Madrid Conference and in the Oslo agreements.

Today, as never before, there is an urgent need to achieve progress in the peace process on the Israeli-Palestinian track, which is the core of the conflict in the Middle East. Just last year, peace between Israelis and Palestinians seemed to be within reach. Regrettably, 14 months of violence have not only claimed the lives of hundreds of people, but have also pushed the parties farther apart than they have ever been over the past decade.

The basic elements of the position of Ukraine on the Palestinian issue were presented to the General Assembly earlier today. I would like to reiterate just a few important points. The recommendations of the Mitchell report and the Tenet work plan constitute a solid basis for finding a way out of the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. The full and immediate implementation by the parties of the steps envisaged therein will lead the way towards bringing the violence to an end, restoring mutual trust and confidence and creating the necessary conditions for the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation process. Peace in the

Middle East can be achieved only through negotiations aimed both at the establishment of a viable Palestinian State and at ensuring the right of the State of Israel to live within secure and internationally recognized borders.

The achievement of a comprehensive Middle East settlement is impossible without finding acceptable solutions to all its integral parts, in particular on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks. In this regard, we welcome the fact that, over the past year, the situation in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in South Lebanon has been marked mostly by general stability and gradual restoration to normalcy. Israel, pursuant to Security Council resolution 425 (1978), has withdrawn from the southern part of the country.

My country remains concerned, however, by serious breaches of the Blue Line, especially in the Shebaa farms area, in direct violation of Security Council decisions, and by the exchanges of fire across the Blue Line. As a troop-contributing country to UNIFIL, we have been particularly alarmed by actions that put the security of UNIFIL at risk. Such acts are totally unacceptable and should be prevented from happening again.

We encourage the Lebanese and Israeli parties to enter into a dialogue on all issues that remain outstanding following the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and the establishment of the Blue Line. We also call on the parties concerned to exercise utmost restraint and to refrain from any acts of violence or provocation against each other, while ensuring full respect of the Blue Line, as identified by the United Nations. We believe that the full restoration of the effective authority of the Lebanese Government in South Lebanon will undoubtedly contribute to further progress in UNIFIL's discharging of its mandate and in ensuring its safety.

The process of reconfiguring and redeploying UNIFIL has unfolded smoothly so far. However, my country believes that the further implementation of the Secretary-General's reconfiguration plan should be directly linked to developments in the situation on the ground and in the region as a whole, as well as to the security situation in respect of UNIFIL.

Ukraine has contributed an engineering battalion to UNIFIL, which performs demining in South Lebanon and is thereby helping to return that area to normal life. My country stands ready to expand its contribution to these efforts by participating in humanitarian demining and by engaging its industrial and technological potential in the reconstruction of that country.

We regret that there has not been substantial progress on the Israeli-Syrian track over the past year. It is in the interests of all the peoples of the region to have the Israeli-Syrian talks on the occupied Syrian Golan resume without further delay or preconditions. In this regard, we call on the Governments of Israel and Syria to again re-engage in direct talks. We hope that the election of Syria this year as a non-permanent member of the Security Council will facilitate progress in the Israeli-Syrian dialogue, which is so desperately needed if there is to be any hope of improving the situation in the Middle East.

In conclusion, I would like to state once again that the priorities of Ukraine's foreign policy in the region are developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all nations in the Middle East, as well as facilitating the peace process there. The appointment last September by the President of Ukraine of a plenipotentiary envoy for the Middle East reaffirms Ukraine's determination to contribute further to the achievement of comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this afternoon. We shall continue to hear the remaining speakers in the debate on this item on Monday, 3 December, at 10 a.m.

A number of representatives have requested to exercise the right of reply. May I remind Members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second intervention, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Hamzehei (Islamic Republic of Iran): It is quite natural these days for the representative of the Zionist regime to make incoherent outbursts. Their savage treatment of the Palestinians, and especially of Palestinian children, has outraged the world and brought about condemnation of the Zionist regime. The unsubstantiated assertions made by the Zionist representative today, including those regarding the bombing incident in Buenos Aires, were meant to divert attention from the brutality and violations perpetrated against the Palestinian people in total

disregard of the Fourth Geneva Convention. As to the perennial question of whether those fighting occupation are terrorists or freedom fighters — and the lines are clearly defined in that respect — forces of occupation and those with greater military capabilities have traditionally considered those under their tyranny who did not wilfully submit to their injustice to be terrorists.

It is astonishing that a regime with a dark record of developing, producing and stockpiling many inhumane kinds of weapons of mass destruction ventures to accuse a country that is among those in the Middle East that have acceded to the most basic international instruments in effect in the field of disarmament. Iran is a full party to instruments that are among the main pillars of international disarmament, such as the 1925 Geneva Protocol, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention. Despite numerous appeals from the international community, Israel has consistently refused to join those instruments, and is continuing its clandestine programme to develop and produce several kinds of weapons of mass destruction. Israel now remains the only non-party to the NPT in the Middle East. At the same time, its nuclear programme and its unsafeguarded facilities continue, alarmingly, to threaten regional and global peace and security.

The regime does not enjoy a better record in other fields of disarmament, particularly in the biological and chemical areas. There are numerous reports of Israel's clandestine chemical and biological programme. Israel's refusal to join the relevant treaties is another corroborating indication of the existence of such programmes that heightens the deep concerns of the international community about its programmes to develop weapons of mass destruction and its arsenals.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic would like to exercise its right of reply to respond to the shameless attempts to spread misconceptions made by the representative of Israel in the General Assembly this afternoon.

Let me stress at the very outset that the representative of Israel said everything but the truth in his statement. Israel and its representatives seem to believe that the use of such words as peace, security and terrorism and the shedding of crocodile tears before the international community can divert attention from the main cause for the tense situation in the Middle East. That cause is first, and last, Israel's occupation of Arab lands in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

If any representative in this Hall were to look into the rather tedious tirade we have just heard from the Israeli delegation, he would not find a single word about Israel's occupation of Arab land. Israel is the last country to have the right to speak about terrorism. Israel is the first and sole school of terrorism in the region. Many excellent pupils have graduated from that school. Let us recall that some of its graduates are known killers wanted by international tribunals. I believe everyone here knows whom I mean. They were responsible for Deir Yassin, Kibbiya, Sabra, Shatila, Qana and, just a few days ago, Beit Rima.

In the last 12 months alone, Israel has succeeded in killing over 800 Palestinians. The latest of those victims were five Palestinian children on their way to school on a rather lovely morning in the beautiful land of Palestine. And now the representative of Israel has come to speak to us about terrorism. Shame! What a farce! What about Israel's siege of Beirut for over 80 days? And the representative of Israel still speaks of terrorism. Israel is a master at, and excellent practitioner of, terrorism.

Thirty-three years ago, Israel uprooted half a million Syrians from their towns and villages in the Golan. Israel is now building settlements atop the ruined homes of those uprooted people. What peace does Israel talk about? What resolutions is Israel talking about? If Israel is truly desirous of achieving peace, why has it not yet implemented United Nations resolutions? What has prevented it from doing so?

Since 1948, Syria has hosted many Palestinian refugees; actually the figure is half a million. Syria has tried to compensate those refugees for all the depravations visited upon them by Israel. At least they have the means for a dignified life. It is not strange for Israel to accuse these refugees and their organizations of terrorism, as for Israel the only good Palestinian is a dead Palestinian. Israel does not want those people back. When those Palestinians call for return, they are hunted down and killed in neighbouring Arab countries. Many capitals of many Member States of the United Nations have witnessed massacres of Palestinians by Israel. These acts are well known.

Furthermore, my delegation wishes to stress again that the headquarters of the organizations mentioned by the representative of Israel in his statement are in Palestine. He knows that full well. It was Israel that allowed at least some of those organizations to return. As for the offices in Syria, they are information offices that practise no other activities. Syria will stand shoulder to shoulder with Lebanon and its people until they regain all their land under Israeli occupation.

Syria paved the way to peace. Israeli conditions and insistence on occupation were the factors that ended negotiations. In other words, in practice, Israel ended negotiations. If it refuses to withdraw, why negotiate? What are we negotiating on? Despite all these difficulties, Syria has said at the highest levels that it has no preconditions for peace except the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace. This is rejected by Israel. Israel wants peace, security and land. Israel makes a grave mistake if it believes that those three objectives can be reconciled.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): A careful examination of the statement by the representative of Israel makes us realize that the objective is to incite some parties against a small country like Lebanon and to exploit a difficult international situation condemned by Lebanon and the entire international community at a time when Lebanon is trying to revive its economy and resume a life that has just begun to return to normal.

As others have done, I wish to ask why there was resistance in Lebanon. Why did Lebanon resist for more than 22 years? Why was the infrastructure destroyed in Lebanon? Why did the economy suffer so greatly? Why did Lebanon resist? Was the primary reason not the Israeli occupation and the Israeli insistence on destroying Lebanon?

Why is there an intifada now in the occupied Palestinian territories? Is the reason not the Israeli occupation? Is the reason not the denial of agreements by Israel? Is it not Israel's disregard for international legitimacy and the principles of international law?

Israel considers that it has completed its withdrawal from Lebanon. What are the air, sea and land incursions perpetrated daily by Israel? Are they not a form of occupation? Comprehensive withdrawal means a cessation of these breaches by air, sea and land. We are adamant on the issue of the Shebaa farmlands. They are ours. That was recognized was Syria. Indeed, the Secretary-General in his report of May 2000 said that the United Nations has demarcated the line of withdrawal. This is a virtual line that cannot in any way jeapordize Lebanon's rights.

In one of the paragraphs of his statement, the representative of Israel took Lebanon to task for invoking international legitimacy. He said that we hide behind it and exploit it. Let me ask Israel why it does not invoke international legitimacy and why it does not implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which are first and foremost international legitimacy. Lebanon is a small country. All we have is our ability to invoke international legitimacy. We shall continue to invoke international legitimacy until our rights are fulfilled and until just and comprehensive peace is established in Lebanon and in the entire region.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): The debate on this agenda item has largely amounted to a steady stream of allegations levelled against Israel by representatives of regimes that are themselves widely recognized as guilty of atrocities far worse than those of which Israel stands accused.

Incredibly, the representative of Syria would like us to believe that Israel is the source of terror in the Middle East and that Syria is, in fact, a leading force against terror. That Syria should attempt to divert attention from its well-known record of support for terrorism is not altogether surprising. Syria harbours, supports and encourages some of the most vicious terrorist organizations in the world, many of which have chosen for these reasons to make their home quite comfortably in Damascus. Syria has even employed terrorist tactics against its own citizens, as it did in the hideous terrorist massacre committed by the Syrian regime in the city of Hama in 1982, in which 30,000 civilians were butchered and the city was replaced with a parking lot.

As for Lebanon, whose territory continues to serve as a base for terrorist operations against Israel, its consistent refusal to prevent its territory from being used as a springboard for terrorist attacks against my country is the primary source of instability along the Blue Line. The Secretary-General has repeatedly drawn attention to this fact. Any attempt to accuse Israel of cross-border aggression is a thinly veiled attempt to

divert attention from Lebanon's consistent failure to comply with the will of the international community.

With regard to the statement by the representative of Iran, we have yet another example of a State widely recognized as one of the world's leading sponsors of terrorism seeking to shift attention to so-called Israeli aggression. Iran is a primary supporter of terrorist operations of the Hezbollah and has had a hand in countless terrorist operations against Israelis and other nationals over the years.

I am confident that for most delegates, the question of who is a terrorist is not a difficult one to answer. Perhaps, when the day comes when these regimes who have spoken here today can look at themselves in the mirror and see their true character, we will be able to overcome the major threat to peace and security in the new millennium and move forward to a future of peace and coexistence for the benefit of all peoples of the region.

The Acting President: Before giving the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to exercise his right to a second intervention, may I remind delegates that second interventions are limited to five minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): As a matter of fact, the latest statement by the representative of Israel deserves no reply. As usual, it is replete with lies, exaggerations and distortion of facts. I had wished that he had said one word on the roots of the dispute in the Middle East and the reason for all these developments.

The reason, as I have recently stated, is Israeli occupation. I should like to stress in this regard that our people, brought up to cherish our dignity and our place in the world, will not give an inch in our demand for our legitimate rights — the liberation of our land from Israeli occupation.

As for talk of terrorism and its meaning, Israel's victims are to be found everywhere in the world. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been scattered in many parts of the world for many years.

According to United Nations reports, Israel has violated the Blue Line 3,000 times, the Blue Line that the representative of Israel seems to cherish so much. This is a farce. Did Israel not kill Count Bernadotte, the peace envoy? These are facts that are well known and require no reply.

When Syria looks in the mirror, and when Arabs look at themselves in the mirror, they see only a noble history and a civilization that promoted the development of humanity. Our region is the birthplace of humanity and civilization. Let Israel look in the mirror. It will only see its victims. Not a single Palestinian home has escaped Israel missiles, bullets and destruction. Half a million Palestinian refugees live in Syria alone. One half million displaced Syrians are also in Syria. So my advice to the Israeli delegation is to look in the mirror. Look at the reality of what Israel is.

Furthermore, the statements that we heard yesterday and today stress that Israel is a country of occupation. It is the only State that is formally called an occupying State in United Nations resolutions. How can the representative of Israel look at us and say what he says? Injustice and terrorism have been perpetrated by Israel against Arabs continuously since 1948.

I would reiterate and stress that Palestinian organizations in Syria have their main headquarters in Palestinian territory. The ones in Syria are mere information offices that practise no other activities.

The entire world, particularly the developing countries, gained independence through a struggle against occupation and colonialism, and I would assure the Israeli representative that we shall not kneel either before Sharon or the Israeli army of occupation. These rights of ours will be ours again sooner or later. They are rights that are recognized by international legitimacy. We are prepared to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy, whereas Israel refuses to do so — a country that put an end to the peace process.

The rights of peoples cannot be ignored or forgotten, as Israel wishes.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall be brief. I do have a few comments to make. I should like to refer the representative of Israel to the Secretary-General's reports and those of his representative in Lebanon to determine the number of breaches committed by Israel from May 2000 to September of this year. There were 2,792 such breaches, mostly by air, with Israel making supersonic

flights over Lebanese towns and villages. Is this not provocation? Is this not an incitement to terrorism?

Mr. Jacob (Israel): Listening to this debate is somewhat an Orwellian experience, where day is night and night is day, and good is bad and bad is good. Member States that are known to support terrorism, to abuse human rights, to be brutal dictatorships, have the audacity to level baseless allegations against my country, which has been for years a victim of terrorism. I trust that the international community knows better, and that these countries will be held accountable for harbouring, financing, training and supporting terrorist organizations.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.